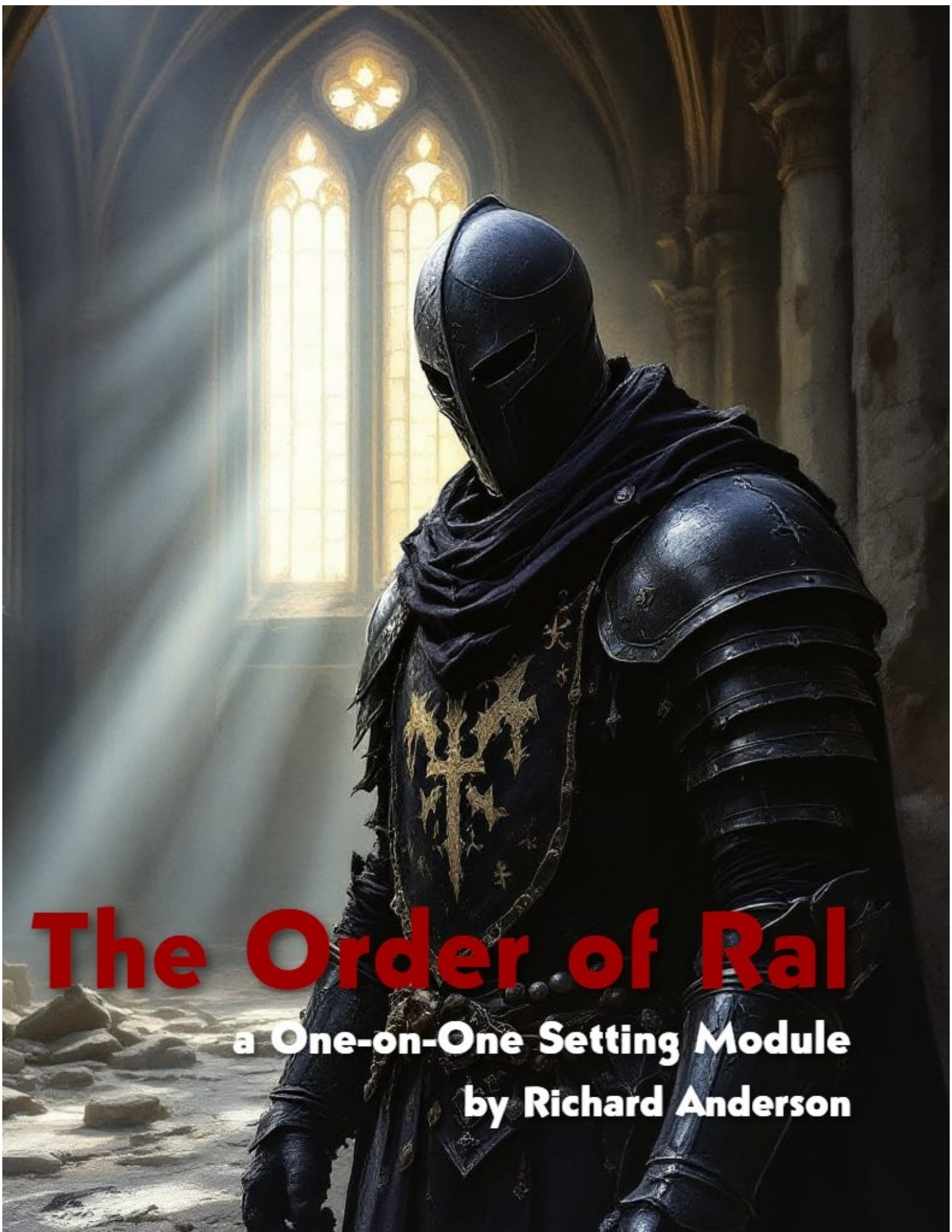

The Order of Ral

a One-on-One Setting Module

by Richard Anderson

The Order of Ral

A One-on-One RPG Setting Module

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Introduction

It all began with a metal miniature – the 1977 Ral Partha Superhero, otherwise known as the Death Dealer. As an avid fantasy novel reader, I had already been a fan of fantasy artists like Michael Whelan and Frank Frazetta, having drooled over Whelan's Elric covers on Moorcock books and Frazetta's barbarian scenes of Conan slaughtering the masses. It was the latter that lead me, of course, to the original Death Dealer painting, one of my favorites by Frazetta, and the same image that the Ral Partha figure was based on.

This was the same period of time in which I was introduced to my first true childhood addiction, Dungeons & Dragons, and not long after, I purchased Dragon Magazine #39, discovering the anti paladin class inside. It was intended to be an NPC class but, somehow, my GM allowed me to use it and run with a character concept loosely based on it, influenced by that little metal miniature.

His name was based on that miniature's brand, Ral Partha, and he was not only a grim, dark, anti paladin, but he was undead as well. His career was short lived, primarily due to the typical attention span of a 12 year old kid, but his personage was never forgotten, which is what has emerged within these pages.

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BOOK I — PREMISE & SETTING

Chapter 1: The Broken Age of Saints and Graves

> "The saints are bones in glass.
> The kings are bones in gold.
> The poor are bones in ditches.
> Only the dead are equal, now."
> — Street prayer in a border-town tavern

The world is not yet dead, but it is dying in slow circles.

Once, the land was bright with banners and processions. Saints walked in story and, sometimes, in truth. Great churches stood at the heart of kingdoms, bell-towers ringing over markets and fields. The dead were buried in neat rows under clean stone, and people believed the ground itself would remember them kindly.

Now, the bells falter.

The banners hang in halls where the roof leaks.

The saints are mostly silent, and the dead no longer stay where they are put.

This is the **Broken Age of Saints and Graves**: a late-medieval, Europe-flavored world sliding by inches toward ruin. The old order still exists on parchment and coins and in the stubborn minds of the old, but in practice, power has splintered:

- Kings rule **half-crowns of territory**, surrounded by independent lords who act as they please.
- Bishops preach obedience in churches where half the pews are empty and the other half are listening with knives in their belts.
- Mercenary companies have become moving city-states, hired to fight wars that never end or burn out of control.

And threading through all of this, like cracks in winter ice, are:

- **Undead infestations** in the marches and grave-fields,
- **Plague winds** that blow from city to city, hollowing them from the inside,
- And a creeping, whispered dread of a pale star that should not be there at all.

The living still eat, love, lie, and bargain. Markets still open. Weddings still happen. But everything feels like it is happening in the shadow of something already half-decided: the sense that the story of the world has reached the last chapter and is only reading itself out of duty.

It is into that twilight that *the **Order of Ral*** rides.

Not as saviors. Not as angels.

As dead knights who refused to lie still.

Ruined Crowns and Fraying Banners

There are still kings, dukes, princes, and councils. They hold courts in drafty halls, send letters sealed with old wax, and argue over who has the right to tax which valley.

On the maps that remain, you can still trace the outlines of once-great realms:

- **Kingdoms** whose borders used to run from sea to mountains, now shrunk to a handful of counties and a road they no longer fully control.
- **Free cities** that once boasted of their trade fairs and now worry more about keeping the dead out of their wells.
- **Marcher lordships**, battered strips of land whose entire purpose is to stand between the heartlands and the horrors in the wastes.

Many places remember better days. They display **faded banners** and **cracked coats of arms** like relics of a past marriage that no one can quite admit is over. The ruling classes cling to ceremony:

- Feasts are still held, under chandeliers with missing candles.
- Trials by law are called, but the condemned are just as likely to "disappear" before judgment.
- Tournaments are rare; when held, their lists are shorter, their prizes poorer, their rules harsher.

In such a world, *the Order of Ral* is not easily welcomed.

The rulers remember that there were knights once who took holy vows, protected the weak, and attended court in polished mail. They look at the Ral—armored corpses on corpse-steeds—and see a blasphemous echo of what they've lost.

Yet when plague-wagons roll through the streets, and when the graveyards crack open after a thunderstorm, it is not to living knights that the desperate send their last letters.

It is to the Chapterhouses of Ral.

Churches of Fading Light

Once, the Church of the Sun-Host (under whatever local name it wears) could name saints in every province who had worked miracles within living memory. There are shrines where this is still true—little roadside chapels where candles burn and something kind still listens.

But across most of the world, the Church has **fractured**:

- Some bishops insist that nothing vital has changed—that this is merely a "time of testing," and that as long as the faithful obey, the Sun will blaze again.
- Others preach that the age of saints is over, and that only strict discipline and obedience will prevent the entire world from drowning in sin and rot.
- A few quietly fear that they are kneeling to an empty sky, and that something else has taken up residence in the darkness behind it.

The Church cannot ignore the undead. It cannot ignore the plagues. And it cannot ignore the growing rumors of **temple-fortresses** belonging to another faith altogether—the **Choir of the Grave Star**, whose rites do not distinguish much between the living and the dead.

In this context, the Ral are both **asset** and **accusation**.

- They are living proof that the Church once sanctioned—however reluctantly—a rite that turned devout knights into undead weapons.
- They are also a reminder that the Church could not hold the line with living soldiers alone.

Some priests bless the Order openly. Some spit when a Ral rides past and then bless the ground afterward.

Some invite the Ral into chapels—but only at night, when the congregation will not see, and always with candles already lit.

The **Reliquaries** of the old saints still exist, but:

- Many relics have gone silent, or warped, or cracked under the pressure of the Grave Star's influence.
- Miracles, when they happen, are often tinged with unease: a fever that breaks but leaves strange marks, a vision that leads to safety but shows something inhuman looking back.

Faith is still a force. It can still drive back the dark—sometimes. But in this age, even Faith carries a shadow: the fear that devotion, misdirected, might feed the wrong power.

A World of Graves

Everywhere you go, the dead are close.

- Cities still have cemeteries: neat rows of stone, mausoleums built by guild, trenches dug hurriedly during plague.
- Villages bury their own in hillside plots, under wooden markers that rot faster than anyone expects.
- Battlefields become charnel fields, left half-tended when the next war starts before the old bodies are cold.

In past ages, these places were melancholy but safe. Now, any patch of ground that holds too many bodies and too little care can become a **wound in the world**.

You hear of:

- **Barrow-towns** built over old mass graves that now ooze mist and ghost-lights at night.
- **Pilgrim routes** whose waystations are haunted by those who never reached their saint's shrine.
- **Harvest fields** where skeletons push up through the dirt when the plow cuts too deep.

Undead in this world are not rare curiosities. They are a **grinding background problem**:

- The poorest districts maintain their own small watch-groups to keep "the risen" from slipping back into tenements.
- Roadside inns hire strong-armed guards not only to protect against bandits, but to make sure no one keeps walking after their throat is cut in a robbery.
- There are guilds—some official, some not—who specialize in "**re-burial work**", moving bodies from unsafe graves to more stable ground.

All of this would be bad enough if it were only the consequence of neglect and old wars. But it is not.

There is a pattern to some of the dead rising.

There are marks cut into their bones.

There are songs that should not be sung over a corpse, but are.

And more and more often, those songs trace back to one name: **Athrakar, the Grave Star**.

Plague Winds and Night Roads

If the dead were the only problem, the living might have managed.

But disease has its own banners.

- Plagues sweep through the cities in waves, riding trade routes and pilgrim roads.
- Small towns wake up to find three houses mysteriously shuttered and silent, smoke no longer rising from their chimneys.

- In some places, carts go street to street at dusk, taking "voluntary passengers" away to plague-barracks that are never seen again.

The Church says the plagues are the result of sin, bad air, and foreign influences.

Whispered rumor says some of them are deliberately seeded by members of the **Choir**, as part of their slow work of hollowing out resistance.

Whatever the truth, the effect is the same:

- People are afraid to gather in large numbers, which weakens markets and councils.
- Many will not open their door after sunset, no matter who knocks.
- City guards are reluctant to touch fallen comrades without seeing them burn first.

Roads, once the veins of trade and pilgrimage, are now **arteries of risk**:

- After dark, only the desperate, the foolish, or the armed travel.
- Villages close their gates at dusk and leave travelers outside unless they carry recognizable seals or are escorted by knights or mercenaries.
- Even military convoys march nervously; more than one column has woken in the small hours to discover its own cook-fire corpses rising with empty eyes.

Into this darkness rides a Ral and whatever Companions are brave enough—or broken enough—to go with them. The world learns, over time, to recognize the sound of an undead war-horse on cobbles and the way conversation dies when that sound draws near.

The Order of Ral in the Broken Age

The **Order of Ral** began as a desperate gamble.

When it became clear that living armies and living saints could not stop every outbreak, could not be in every graveyard, could not answer every plague, certain voices within the Church and among the noble war councils proposed something unforgivable and necessary:

> "If the dead will not stay dead,
> then let us give the dead a reason to obey
> us instead."

With forbidden rites, relic fragments, and oaths that scarred the soul, the first knight—**Ral Parthanus**—submitted to a ritual that killed him and raised him back in the same motion, bound to a purpose:

- To hunt the undead without needing rest,
- To walk unbreathing through plague-winds,
- To stand where living men broke.

Others followed. Not many.

Originally, there were **thirty-six** Ral.

Now, there are **twenty-one**.

The rest met **Quietus**—the Final Death that even their rite cannot turn aside.

The Order's Chapterhouses were founded as **mixtures of fortress, monastery, and charnel house**. In the Broken Age:

- Some have been destroyed utterly by the Choir.
- Some have been taken over by frightened nobles or repurposed as mundane fortresses.
- A few remain true to their original purpose, hanging on by the stubborn will of their resident Rals and the living staff who have chosen to serve the dead.

In the eyes of the world, *the Order of Ral* is:

- To some peasants: **a last hope**, riders who come when everyone else has turned away.

- To some nobles: **a useful terror**, discharged at enemies and then politely asked to leave.
- To some clergy: **a theological offense**, a reminder that the Church endorsed necromancy under another name.

To themselves, the Ral are none of these things. They are simply:

- Dead knights who remember what they swore when alive,
- Bound to keep their oaths past the point where their hearts stopped beating,
- Waiting for the moment when Quietus finally catches up.

They do not ask whether the world deserves saving.

They ask whether they deserve to be the ones trying.

Mechanical Notes: The Broken Age of Saints and Graves

These are **assumptions and tags** for the setting; they do not introduce new mechanics, but shape how the One-on-One System is used.

- **Tech Level:** Late medieval. Plate armor, crossbows, early siege engines, no gunpowder in general use.
- **Magick Baseline:**
  - Faith and Sorcery exist as per this module's magick chapter.
  - True miracles are rare and often complicated by the Grave Star's influence.
- **Undead Prevalence:**
  - Undead are common enough that most people have seen or heard of them first-hand.
  - Many adventures will assume at least one undead-related threat or complication.
- **Tone & Consequences:**
  - Default tone is **dark, mature, tragic heroism**.
  - Quietus is inevitable; the Order is not a path to immortality, but a way of **spending** what remains meaningfully.
- **Default Assumption:**
  - The Protagonist is a Ral beginning play with a functioning but strained **Chapterhouse**, 1–3 regular traveling Companions, and a world visibly sliding toward the Choir's dominion.

All standard One-on-One rules apply: d100 Skills, Attributes, Clocks, Destiny, Advantages/Disadvantages, DoS/DoF. The setting layers **undead, Faith, Sorcery, Corruption, and the Choir** onto that skeleton.

Chapter 2: The Rise of the Choir of the Grave Star

> "We looked up and saw a star we did not know.
> Then we heard it sing, and some of us never stopped listening."
> — Anonymous Choir defector

If the Broken Age is an illness, the **Choir of the Grave Star** is not merely a symptom.

It is the **infection learning how to write its own scripture**.

There have always been cults and heresies. There have always been death-gods, patron saints of the dying, comforters of the sick. The Church long ago learned to tolerate some and crush others.

The Choir is different.

It does not simply venerate death. It venerates a very specific death:

- A star that should have been bright and is now dark.
- A god—or thing like a god—that failed, fell, or was killed.
- A presence that offers not peace, but **rotting stillness**.

This is **Athrakar, the Grave Star**—depicted in Choir art as:

- A pale, dead eye in the sky,
- A circle of cold silver floating above fields of bone,
- A star whose light does not warm but bleaches.

When people speak of the Choir, they often blame a distant land, an ancient heresy, a forgotten book. There are a dozen contradictory origin stories.

The only thing that matters is this:

Where the Choir goes, **the living shrink**, and **the dead organize**.

Athrakar, the Grave Star

No one sane worshipped Athrakar when the world was young.

If the oldest stories are to be believed, Athrakar was:

- A dim, cold star at the edge of the sky,
- Associated with endings, closed books, last harvests, and winter graves,
- Recognized but never loved.

Old farmers had rituals to keep its eye off their fields. Grave-tenders muttered its name only to make sure it stayed asleep. In early saint-legends, Athrakar appears as the shadow behind other powers: a reminder that even miracles must one day stop.

At some point—no one agrees quite when—Athrakar **changed**.

Or perhaps the world changed around it.

When the first great plagues came and armies died by thousands, when mass graves became normal and saints stopped answering prayer as often, people started to notice a particular pale star in the sky:

- It seemed brighter in cemeteries.
- It seemed to hang lower over charnel fields.
- Those who stared at it too long reported hearing a **thin, beautiful music** that made them forget how cold they were.

The Church officially declared Athrakar a "**malign sign**", a thing to be warded against. They wrote new prayers invoking the Sun-Host against the Grave Star. They held solemn days of looking down, backs bent, to deny it their eyes.

This reaction gave Athrakar exactly what such things always want:

- **Names**,
- **Attention**,
- **Fear**.

A small number of people began to ask a question:

> "If the saints cannot keep us alive,
> what might we gain by siding with the
> power that rules the grave instead?"

The Choir of the Grave Star grew out of that question.

Doctrine of the Choir

The Choir calls itself many things in different tongues:

- The Choir of the Grave Star
- The Congregation of Stillness
- The Order of the Final Light

In all languages, its doctrine rests on a few core truths (as they see them):

1. **Life is a disease.**
   The pain, hunger, fear, and desperation of mortal existence are not regrettable necessities; they are evidence that life is a mistake. The world is a fever. The more people struggle to live, the worse it gets.
2. **Death is not an end, but a correction.**
   When bodies rot and bones bleach, when motion stops and hunger ends, Athrakar's influence is said to be "closest." The grave is not a punishment, but a cure for the disease of wanting.
3. **The Grave Star is mercy misunderstood.**
   The Choir argues that Athrakar has always offered humanity quiet and an end to struggle, but the old cults refused to listen, clinging to the bright cruelty of the Sun. Now, with saints silent, Athrakar's song is growing stronger.
4. **The living must be guided into stillness.**
   Left alone, mortals cling to life and misery. Therefore, the Choir must act:
   - Spreading plagues that "calm the noisy."
   - Raising select dead as **instruments of order**.
   - Turning kings into stewards of mass graves rather than realms.
5. **Undeath is a bridge, not a reward.**
   Unlike some crude necromancers, the Choir does not promise eternal individual glory to its followers. Undeath is a tool:
   - To enforce Athrakar's will.
   - To finish work that fragile living hands cannot.
   - To stand as **examples of the peace that comes after fear is burned out.**

Ironically, this last point is exactly where the Choir and *the Order of Ral* intersect—and why they must always be at war.

Both create undead.

Both claim to do so for a purpose beyond ego.

Only one believes that after the work is done, anything worth living for will remain.

Structure of the Choir

The Choir is not a single, tidy hierarchy. It is more like a **tumor**:

- It grows in multiple places at once,
- Sends out filaments to test new ground,

- Draws blood and strength from whatever it embeds itself in.

Still, there are recognizable roles and ranks.

- **Whisperers**
    - Lay preachers and recruiters. They haunt taverns, sick-houses, and graveyards, offering "comforting truths" to those who have lost too much.
    - They are the first sign that the Choir has taken root in a region.
- **Cantors**
    - Ritual leaders who can conduct simple Athrakaran rites: grave-chants, bone-markings, low-level plague blessings.
    - They often present themselves as alternative clergy when local churches fail.
- **Precentors**
    - Mid-ranking leaders responsible for temple-fortresses and regional cells.
    - Command small undead retinues, oversee inquisitions, and maintain ties with puppet nobles.
- **Star-Readers**
    - Those who claim to "hear" Athrakar most clearly.
    - They interpret omens: plagues, eclipses, dreams.
    - Often half-mad, but their predictions of collapse and outbreak are unsettlingly accurate.
- **Undertakers of the Final Song**
    - Elite necromancer-priests.
    - Responsible for large-scale plague-rites, grave-legions, and binding particularly powerful undead to specific tasks (city pacification, border sealing).

At the very top, if such a thing exists, rumor speaks of a **High Chorus**:

- An inner circle of Star-Readers and Undertakers who direct long-term strategy: which kingdom to hollow next, which Chapterhouse of Ral to target, which saint's bones to corrupt.

From the outside, the Choir's structure is deliberately confusing:

- It infiltrates existing churches, guilds, and noble courts.
- A local bishop might secretly be a Precentor; a respected undertaker might be Whisperer and Cantor both.
- Choir members often keep their everyday roles as civic leaders, judges, or healers.

By the time a region realizes that half its institutions answer to the same pale star, it is often too late.

Temple-Fortresses and Puppet Princes

The Choir does not only operate in shadows.

Where it feels secure, it **builds**.

A **temple-fortress of the Grave Star** is a hybrid structure:

- Outwardly a church or monastery, often built on the foundations of an older Sun-Host shrine.
- Inwardly a fortress: thick walls, controlled entrances, barracks for zealots, crypts beneath.
- Hidden purpose: to serve as a **glyph** on the land, a fixed point from which Athrakar's influence can radiate.

Temple-fortresses are:

- Centers of **plague management**—deciding who is "mercy-killed," who is quarantined, and who is quietly raised for service.
- **Administrative hubs** for Puppet Princes: local rulers who have pledged themselves to the Choir in exchange for survival, power, or the promise that their families will be "preserved" after death.
- Sites of **mass rites**: chanted services where the line between sermon and spell blurs and the air feels thin.

Under a Puppet Prince, life changes gradually:

- Laws begin to **prioritize stability over compassion**.
- Penalties for theft or dissent often include "reassignment to necessary labor" in plague wards or grave farms.
- Public sermons quietly shift: the Sun-Host is described as a "younger light," a necessary stage that the world has outgrown.

As the Choir's grip tightens:

- Taxes are collected in **bodies**, not just coin: condemned criminals, political enemies, and the "excess starving" are sent to work at temple-fortresses, then vanish into the crypts.
- Town guards are supplemented—or replaced—by **corpse-watch patrols**: disciplined undead squads overseen by Cantors.
- Nobody can recall exactly when the bells stopped ringing at dawn and started tolling at dusk instead.

The Ral see these places as **abscesses** in the world's flesh. They cannot always storm them; they are too many, too fortified, too politically entangled.

But every campaign against the Choir touches a web of temple-fortresses and puppet thrones.

Undead Legions and Plague-Rites

The Choir's mastery of undeath is not haphazard. It is **structured and scaled**.

On the lowest level:

- **Grave-walkers** and shambling corpses are created with simple rites, often performed en masse in plague-pits.
- These serve as labor, terror weapons, and basic garrison troops.

On the higher levels:

- **Bonewardens** — skeletal guardians carved with Athrakaran sigils, stationed in temple-fortresses and on palace gates.
- **Plague-Priest Husks** — former clergy, hollowed out and turned into walking reliquaries of disease; they spread infection simply by being near the living.
- **Choir-Knights** — elite undead warriors bound to Athrakar, dark reflections of the Ral. They ride dead mounts, wear temple-forged armor inscribed with Grave Star hymns, and often lead charges against Chapterhouses.

Plague-rites function as both **spiritual offerings** and **strategic tools**:

- Whisperers and Cantors will often "test" an area with small outbreaks: a village, a quarter of a city, a pilgrim camp.
- If resistance is weak or local authorities cooperate, the Choir escalates: coordinated infections, manipulated cures, and selective immunity for those who convert.

- Entire wars have been decided when an army discovered its rear echelons dying in their tents before the battle even began.

To the Choir, an undead legion is not merely an army. It is a **choir**:

- Each corpse, when bound, is said to add its voice to Athrakar's song.
- In some great rites, the dead are arranged in intricate patterns—trenches, towers, bridges—turning whole battlefields into sigils that alter the way death works there.

The Order of Ral is particularly poisonous to the Choir's self-image.

- The Choir claims that Athrakar's path is the only way to make sense of pain and loss.
- The Ral stand as a counterexample: undead who **continue to suffer** and **refuse stillness**.
- Choir-preachers often fixate on the Order in sermons, painting them as "false dead" who have not yet embraced their purpose.

More than one Choir campaign has **prioritized the destruction of a Chapterhouse** over easier strategic gains, simply to silence those dissonant knights.

The Choir's Shadow Over the World

The Choir does not need to conquer every kingdom openly.

It is enough to:

- Corrupt a few churches,
- Turn a few princes,
- Establish temple-fortresses on key trade routes,
- Seed enough plagues and undead legions that ordinary people begin to **assume** Athrakar is inevitable.

In many places, everyday life goes on under the Choir's shadow:

- Farmers attend both Church and Choir rites "just in case," hedging bets.
- Merchants pay tithes to temple-fortresses in the same way they pay road tolls, telling themselves it is only practical.
- Local officials quietly send lists of "dissidents, vagrants, and surplus mouths" to be collected.

The greatest victory Athrakar has won is not any battlefield, but this shift in **assumption**:

- That the world is ending,
- That stillness is better than struggle,
- That the only choice is how you get there, not whether you go.

Standing against that tide, twenty-one undead knights and their ragged allies can look like a joke.

The Choir works very hard to ensure it stays that way.

Mechanical Notes: The Choir of the Grave Star

Again, no new dice mechanics—these are **faction tools and tags** for Directors using the One-on-One engine.

- **Faction Clocks & Fronts:**
  - Treat the Choir as a major **Threat Faction** with one or more Clocks:
    - "Choir Influence in Region 0–100"
    - "Temple-Fortress Completed 0–100"
    - "Puppet Prince Consolidates Power 0–100"

    - Advances when the Protagonist ignores or fails missions, or when Chapterhouse Fortnightly Events favor the Choir.
- **Skills & Identification:**
    - **Lore: Choir & Heresies**, **Faith**, **Theology**, **Insight**, and **Investigation** are primary for spotting Choir influence.
    - Successful Tests may:
        - Reveal hidden Choir members in institutions.
        - Identify temple-fortress construction patterns.
        - Provide Advantage on social Tests to sway the uncertain away from Choir doctrine.
- **Sorcery & Corruption:**
    - Choir Sorcery is always **corruptive**:
        - Any use of Sorcery drawn from Athrakar immediately calls for a **Presence Test** versus Corruption gain (as per Corruption chapter), usually at **–10 or worse**.
        - Working with or under Choir ritual fields may impose **Disadvantage** on Faith and Wardcraft opposed to them.
- **Temple-Fortresses as Sites:**
    - Each temple-fortress functions like a **mini-Chapterhouse** for the Choir:
        - Has its own basic Assets (undead troops, zealots, relics),
        - Uses local Clocks (e.g., "Citizens Pacified," "Plague Contained," "Order of Ral Discredited").
    - Assaulting one should feel like a multi-session arc with:
        - Reconnaissance,
        - Political maneuver,
        - And finally violence or surgical sabotage.
- **Choir-Knights vs Ral:**
    - Choir-knights are **elite recurring foes**:
        - Mechanically, treat them as near-peer adversaries with high combat Skills and a few Sorcery-derived Traits.
        - Facing one should be a significant set-piece scene; defeating or driving one off advances relevant anti-Choir Clocks.
- **Atmospheric Effects:**
    - In regions where Choir influence is very high:
        - Faith-based spells may suffer **–10** unless cast in sanctified or rebel shrines.
        - Corruption gains from all sources are slightly more likely (Director can tilt outcomes gently).
        - Fortnightly Events skew toward plagues, disappearances, and political intrigue.

The Choir is not a monster to be slain; it is a **condition** to be contained and, if the Ral are very fortunate, slowly reversed in some small corner of the world.

Whether that will be enough, in the long shadow of the Grave Star, is another question.

Chapter 3: The Order of Ral

> "They told us that death was a gate.
> They did not say we would be chained to it."
> — Ral Parthanus, first of the death-knights

The First Death-Knight

No one remembers the exact night the rite was performed.

The Church synods burned the records.

The nobles who signed their names to it were careful to "die naturally."

The surviving witnesses spoke of it only in whispers, and then not at all.

What is known, pieced together from half-legends and the Order's own bitter oral tradition, is this:

There was a battle that should never have been fought.

Undead legions surged out of a plague-ravaged valley—bodies stitched with unfamiliar sigils, moving with discipline no shambling horror should have. A border kingdom, long used to skirmishes and barrow-raids, assembled an army to push them back.

It broke.

Not gradually, not honorably—just shattered. Whole companies torn apart. Priests overrun while still lifting their reliquaries. Living knights watching their own fallen rise on the same day, eyes emptied and filled with some other purpose.

At the center of the rout stood one man: **Sir Parthanus of Rallond**.

He should have died then. He did not.

Some say he held the line long enough for a few thousand refugees to escape. Some say he simply refused to run because he could not imagine doing anything else. However it happened, the story says:

- His shield split.
- His horse was dragged down under him.
- His sword broke on an enemy captain's helm.
- And he kept standing.

When they found him afterward, Parthanus was propped against a mound of corpses, eyes open, lips moving in prayer. He had bitten through his own tongue somewhere in the fighting. The blood on his surcoat was mostly not his.

They carried him home.

The physicians called it an impossible survival.

The priests called it a sign.

The strategists called it a resource.

Parthanus healed. Slow, sour healing, full of nightmares and phantom pains. When he could stand again, he went back to the front as soon as he was allowed—only to see yet another line buckle under the same slow pressure: plague, fear, then the organized dead.

Somewhere between shattered battles and burned-out churches, a blasphemous thought took root among desperate minds:

> "If the enemy will not stop raising the dead,
> then let us raise our own. But bind them to something better."

Parthanus was the first to volunteer. Or the first to be volunteered. Accounts differ on that, and the Order never quite agreed which version is less damning.

He was led into a chapel where the saints' faces had been covered and the relics wrapped. Priests, occultists, and battle-magisters gathered around him. There were relic-fragments on the altar and sigils chalked on the stones. Some later histories say a condemned necromancer was forced to advise. Others whisper a Choir defector was present and did not defect for long.

The rite was simple in structure and terrible in cost:

- His living vows were spoken again, word by word, but this time as he lay on his own shroud.
- Faith-based rites pulled at his soul, anchoring it to symbols of duty and sacrifice.
- Sorcerous workings, shaped through forbidden runes and bone-lore, severed his body from the natural path of death.
- And over it all, relic-light burned, trying to keep the whole thing from sliding irrevocably into Athrakar's waiting gravity.

Parthanus died.

His heart stopped. His breath ended. The room filled with a feeling like the moment before a prayer is answered—or refused.

Then he opened his eyes.

They did not glow. There was no fanfare of trumpets or screams of the damned.

He simply... sat up.

He looked at his hands. He wept without tears.

He stood again, mortally wounded, already dead, still himself.

He became **Ral Parthanus**—first of the death-knights.

Thirty-Six Oaths in the Dark

The rite could have ended there, a single horror prefiguring worse things to come. Instead, it spread—quietly, under seals and oaths.

A handful of others were chosen:

- Knights who had lost everything and volunteered.
- Lords whose holdings were down to ash and bled-out banners.
- Paladins whose faith had been broken and reforged in fire.

Some came willingly. Some came as part of political bargains. Some went to their deaths not fully understanding what waited in that shuttered chapel.

Each one emerged changed:

- They no longer breathed, except as mimicry.
- Their hearts did not beat, except when they willed it for appearances among the living.
- They did not sleep. When they lay still, they fell into something more like **remembering** than rest.

They retained:

- Memory.
- Skill.
- Personality.

- And an unbreakable sense of duty that burned even hotter in the absence of hunger, fatigue, or the halo of mortal fear.

They also gained:

- A certain stillness—an absence where warmth used to be.
- A feeling of being held at the edge of something vast and cold.
- An awareness, faint but constant, of a distant pale light: Athrakar's pull, resisted by every symbol of the Sun and every shred of their former oath.

There were **thirty-six** such knights in the first generation. Thirty-six rituals. Thirty-six funerals that looked like promotions. Thirty-six tombs never filled.

They called themselves the **Order of Ral**, after the first of their kind. Some say Parthanus tried to refuse the naming. It did not matter. The world loves to put a single, graspable name on things too big to face honestly.

With them came:

- **Ral-Chapterhouses** — grants of broken fortresses and ruined monasteries where they could gather, refit, and bury what they could not save.
- **Gravesquires, relic-smiths, chaplains, scouts, chirurgeons** — living staff who chose (or were chosen) to serve the dead.
- A **charter** from the Church and several crowns, written in careful language that blessed their mission while never quite admitting what they had become.

For a time, it worked.

Undead outbreaks were crushed that would have ravaged whole regions. Plague-caravans vanished into ravines and did not emerge. Choir cells went quiet without anyone publicly hanging for it.

The Order's banner—a black field with a broken sun and a single, pale star underfoot—became a sign that help had come, if not safety.

But nothing that leans on both Faith and Sorcery can stand forever without cost.

The Choir learned. The plagues worsened. The Church grew uneasy about what it had made.

And thirty-six oaths, spread over too much world, began to fray.

Quietus and the Falling Count

The ritual that creates a Ral is not a promise of eternity. It is a **reprieve**.

Every Ral knows this.

They can be hacked apart, burnt, shattered, blessed, or simply worn down until the tether that holds them frays and snaps. When that happens, they do not rise again. Souls cannot be stretched indefinitely; even the most stubborn rope breaks under too much strain.

The Order has a specific word for that final end: **Quietus**.

- Quietus is not being cut down on the field; that is only another death.
- Quietus is when whatever combination of rite, will, and Faith held a Ral together finally gives way.
- Quietus is when their remains no longer stir when called, when their name in the roll-call receives silence and stays silent.

Of the thirty-six original Ral, **fifteen** have met Quietus.

Some died as you might expect:

- Surrounded by Choir-knights and bone legions, dragged down under sheer weight.
- Standing alone in collapsing crypt-mazes while their Companions fled with stolen relics.
- On walls where they held the line until the last living defender fell and then a little longer.

Others met more complicated ends:

- One was broken by Corruption, their soul so twisted that the Order itself hunted them down.
- One simply walked into the wastes one night and was never seen again; the Order counted them as Quietus after the third year without sign.
- One is said to have turned—to have bent the knee to Athrakar. The Choir denies this for its own reasons. The Order spits when the name is spoken.

The roll of the dead is carved into the walls of the surviving Chapterhouses. It is not short.

Today, there are **twenty-one** Ral.

No one has successfully performed the full rite in years. Not for lack of trying, but because:

- The Church has outlawed the ritual under its own law while secretly begging for the Order's aid.
- Many of the necessary relics and texts were destroyed in earlier purges and battles.
- The Grave Star's pull has grown stronger; every attempt risks sliding into outright necromancy.

There are whispered experiments—half-successes, failures that scream in the crypts and must be put down. The Order's own leaders argue bitterly over whether it is even right to *try* to make more of their kind.

The unspoken truth is this:

If the count of Ral ever falls to zero, there will be no one left who remembers what the world looks like when undead do **not** accept orders from the Grave Star.

Death-Knights in the Eyes of the Living

To a peasant on a road, a Ral looks like a **nightmare in armor**:

- Plate mail that never quite rusts properly, as if the metal remembers the grave.
- Surcoats bearing old heraldry, often bloodstained or moth-eaten, over the black field of the Order.
- A cloak that does not move with the wind quite right.
- A war-horse whose breath does not fog, whose eyes do not blink, whose hooves fall a little too perfectly each time.

The living react in predictable ways.

- Some cross themselves, bow, or kneel, muttering prayers that the dead knight will pass them by.
- Some run.
- Some stare defiantly, daring the monster to make them kneel.

To soldiers and mercenaries, a Ral is:

- A potential ally of terrifying endurance.
- A reminder that officers and nobles can find a way to keep fighting even after everyone else is allowed to stop.
- A **wage hazard**; where a Ral rides, the work is never simple.

To priests, a Ral is:

- A walking theological argument.
- Proof that Faith can bind even the dead to a cause—or that it failed to protect them correctly in the first place.
- A temptation: imagine what the Church could do with dozens more such weapons, if it could just purify the rite.

To the Choir of the Grave Star, a Ral is:

- An insult.
- A loud dissonant note in Athrakar's slowly growing harmony.
- A priority target.

Living Companions who walk beside a Ral see layers under the horror:

- The awkward stillness when the Ral thinks no one is looking.
- The careful way they handle old relics and personal mementos.
- The way they sometimes forget to pretend breathing when caught up in an argument and then consciously start again.

The Order's greatest curse is not merely that it is feared.

It is that it is **needed** by the same people who would happily burn its Chapterhouses if they thought they could survive without them.

Chapterhouses: Fortresses, Monasteries, Tombs

The physical heart of the Order is the **Chapterhouse**.

Every Ral is tied to one:

- A fortress on a cliff above a wasted coast, its lower halls flooded with salt water and bones.
- A walled monastery at the edge of a plague-burned forest, its bells rusted still, its cloister now a training yard.
- A half-buried keep whose upper floors are collapsed, forcing everyone to live near the crypts below.

The Chapterhouse serves as:

- **Home base** between campaigns.
- **Armory** of relics and weapons too dangerous to leave in the wild.
- **Monastery** where rites of Faith and Penance are still attempted.
- **Tomb** for fallen Ral and Companions.

Within its walls, the living and the dead coexist uneasily:

- Gravesquires and staff keep fires burning, food cooking, armor maintained.
- Clergy maintain shrines and chapels, often arguing doctrine late into the night.
- Scouts ride in and out, bringing rumors and hard evidence of Choir moves.
- Ral walk the halls like ancestral ghosts, hands tracing familiar nicks in stone.

The Chapterhouse has its own **Assets and Weaknesses**, tracked elsewhere:

- **Supply** for food, munitions, ritual materials.
- **Hands** for labor, craft, and garrison.
- **Sanctity** for spiritual strength and resistance to the Grave Star's pull.
- **Wear & Stress** as stone and spirit crack under siege.

To the Ral, the Chapterhouse is not just a building. It is:

- A **mirror** of their collective soul.

- A measure of how much they have saved or lost.
- A place whose corridors are lined with the names of the dead—enemies, Companions, and their own.

Every mission begins and ends with the Chapterhouse:

- Ral mount up in shadowed stables, Companions checking straps and saddlebags.
- Fortnightly events bring new crises to the gates even as old ones ride out.
- Relationships with secondary Companions and staff twist and harden in its halls.

If a Chapterhouse falls, the Order loses more than stone.

It loses **memory**.

Oaths and Names

Every Ral carries two names:

- The **name of the life they had**—Lord, Paladin, Border Warden, Castellan, Inquisitor.
- The **name of the death they accepted**—"Ral ."

Their old heraldry is not erased, but **overwritten**:

- Colors dulled to darker shades.
- Crests marked with small black sunbursts and pale star sigils.
- Shields quartered: one quarter their old life, three quarters the Order.

The ritual that created them binds them with layered oaths:

- To **oppose Athrakar and the Choir** wherever they can.
- To **protect the living** where possible, even when the living no longer trust them.
- To **accept Quietus** when it comes, without trying to bind themselves further or cheat the grave a second time.

Of course, oaths and reality diverge.

Some Ral interpret "protect the living" as a license for brutality in the short term.
Some focus so tightly on killing the Choir that they neglect every other obligation.
Some are more loyal to their Chapterhouse staff than to the distant Church that first authorized their existence.

The Order has developed its own sayings over the years:

- "We died standing." — Refusal to regret the rite, however ugly.
- "Stone remembers." — The belief that Chapterhouse walls will somehow keep their history honest.
- "We are the last knights." — Less a boast than a confession.

When a Ral falls in battle and does **not** rise again, their name is carved into the Hall of Names and spoken at vigil. Living Companions and staff speak more about who they were in life than what they did as undead. It is a small defiance against the Grave Star's doctrine that life is meaningless noise.

The Ral and the Choir: Mirrors and Enemies

The Order and the Choir share uncomfortable parallels:

- Both treat death as a **tool**, not merely an end.
- Both use undeath to achieve goals beyond mortal stamina.
- Both claim a **higher purpose** for their horrors.

The Choir says:

> "Life is a disease; undeath is the cure."

The Order replies:

> "Life is a wound; undeath is the bandage
> we chose
> so others would not bleed to death."

The Choir seeks **stillness**—a world where nothing hurts because nothing moves or hopes.

The Order seeks **delay**—the buying of time, breath, and choices for people who may never know who bought it.

Choir-knights are often sent specifically to face Rals in the field:

- To break them physically.
- To break their morale.
- To demonstrate, to watching mortals, that Athrakar's champions are stronger than the Church's shameful dead.

Battles between Ral and Choir-knights are more than duels; they are **arguments in steel** over what death is for.

When a Ral kills a Choir-knight, they hear something faint leave the corpse—a broken note, a failed harmony. When a Choir-knight kills a Ral, the Choir often sings afterward, dragging whatever they can from the broken rite into Athrakar's song.

The Order cannot win in numbers. It can only win in **quality of defiance**:

- How many people escape a city because a Ral held a gate.
- How many relics are reclaimed from corrupted temples.
- How many Companions and staff live to grow old instead of being fed to plague-pits.

The Choir offers certainty: die, and be dissolved into quiet.

The Order offers no such peace. Only:

> "We will stand here until we fall.
> Then, if there is anything left to save, it will
> not be because of Athrakar."

Rals in Play — Mechanical Notes

This chapter is largely narrative. However, the following points tie the lore above into the **One-on-One RPG System** as used in this module.

Protagonist Identity

Every Protagonist is a **Ral**: an undead death-knight of the Order. Each begins with a **former Archetype** (Sun-Host Paladin, Border March Warden, Fallen Lord of War, Grave-Road Templar, etc.) that defines:

- Their **starting Skills**,
- Unique **Traits**,
- A package of **Gear & Assets** reflecting their mortal past.
- In play, they are always addressed as **"Ral ."**

All Rals share the following traits, on top of normal human stats:

- **Undead Physiology**
  - **No Breath, No Pulse:**
    - Rals do not breathe, have no heartbeat, and cannot drown or suffocate.
    - Ignore checks for drowning, suffocation, and choking unless magick or special hazards say otherwise.
- **Immune to Disease & Ordinary Poison:**
  - Rals automatically succeed against mundane disease and non-magical poisons.

    - Magical or alchemical poisons may still affect them, but typically only as **narrative impairments** (stunned senses, sluggish movement, etc.) rather than biological harm.
- **Tireless:**
    - Rals do not suffer Fatigue from marching, watching, or fighting; use only **narrative fatigue** (boredom, strain of will) as determined by the GM.
    - Any existing One-on-One rules for Stamina/Fatigue apply to them **only** when explicitly mental/spiritual (e.g., resisting panic, maintaining a difficult ritual).
- **Night Sight:**
    - Rals suffer **no penalties in dim light** and only half the normal penalty in near-darkness.
- **Grave Sense:**
    - When within a short distance (GM's call, e.g. 10–20 meters) of strong undead or unholy corruption, they may make a Perception or Occult Test to feel a "pressure" or chill, even if they cannot see the source.

Vulnerabilities

- **Radiant & Holy Harm:**
    - Damage from **holy, radiant, or sanctified sources** (spells, relics, blessed weapons) increases the severity of Wounds by **one step**.
    - Rals cannot heal or repair damage caused by such sources without **special rites** or powerful magick.
- **Consecrated Ground:**
    - On properly consecrated ground opposing Athrakar, Rals suffer a **-10% penalty** to offensive actions against truly faithful mortals and saints (but not against undead or the Choir).
    - They may also feel a constant sense of pressure and unease.

Quietus

- Quietus is the **true end state** of a Ral.
- Mechanically, it may be triggered by:
    - Lethal Wound states combined with certain narrative conditions,
    - Extreme Corruption outcomes,
    - or specific story events (ritual sacrifices, relic usage, etc.).
- It is not a rule for casual use; it is a **campaign-level consequence**, to be invoked when the story clearly points to it.

Chapterhouse Context

- The Protagonist begins play tied to a specific **Chapterhouse**, with:
    - Defined starting **Assets** (Supply, Hands, Sanctity, Wear),
    - A cast of **Secondary Companions** and staff,
    - Access to **Stronghold Upgrades**, **Fortnightly Events**, and **Base Life & Relationships** as detailed in later chapters.

- Downtime, Stronghold play, and NPC Relationships are not optional extras; they are **core loops** of this setting.

Conflict with the Choir

- The Choir of the Grave Star is treated as a major **Faction** with Clocks and fronts that advance over the campaign.
- Many missions will revolve around:
    - Intercepting their plagues,
    - Disrupting temple-fortresses,
    - Rescuing or recruiting people on the edge of joining the Choir.
- Appropriate Skills (Lore: Choir & Heresies, Faith, Theology, Sorcery, Command, etc.) and systems (Corruption, Boons, magick) are integrated throughout.

Above all, remember:

- The Ral are not superheroes.
- They are not invincible.
- They are **dead knights trying to spend what's left of themselves** in a world that is trying to forget what knights ever meant.

The chapters that follow will show how to build them on the sheet—with Attributes, Skills, Boons, and Traits to match these stories—and how to test them against a world that has already half-decided it is too late to be saved.

The Bell That Wouldn't Ring

Part I

The first anyone saw of him was the horse.

It came out of the morning mist at a measured walk, hooves thudding on the packed dirt of the village lane with a sound too regular to be natural. No snort, no toss of the head. No steaming breath in the cold. Just *step, step, step*, like a drumbeat coming closer.

Then the rest of him resolved: a rider in plate blackened by old smoke, edges pale where steel had worn through the soot. His surcoat had once been red; now it was a tired, wine-dark brown, the black field of the Order stitched over the heart. Beneath that, someone had sewn the tatters of a long-ago banner, its colors all but gone. The heraldry on his shield – a broken sun above a pale star underfoot – was freshly painted, the only thing about him that looked new.

Children froze in the lane. A woman carrying a pail of water made a sign over her chest without seeming to realize it. A man with an armful of split wood swore softly and took one step back, then thought better of it and bowed instead, eyes down.

The horse stopped at the edge of the muddy square, as if it had reached a point marked on some invisible map. Up close, its wrongness sharpened: hide stretched too tight over bones, empty nostrils, eyes clouded but not blind. Its barding was patched from three different styles of plate and leather, but all had the same flaw — no allowance for breath or sweat. It did not need either.

The rider dismounted in a slow, deliberate motion, as if every movement was measured for the benefit of those watching.

"By the charter of the Order of Ral," he said, voice low and even, "I, Ral Corren of the Marches, answer the summons of Greybarrow."

He said it as if it were a sentence being carried out.

The square said nothing back for a heartbeat. Then, from the doorway of the smallest building facing the village well, a younger voice spoke.

"You remembered the name."

The speaker was a woman in mail with a padded jack thrown on over it, a short sword at her hip and a small round shield slung on her back. Her hair was bound up in a tight knot under a leather coif. Mud splashed up past her boots from too many errands. A gravekeeper's shovel leaned against the wall behind her.

"Tamsin," Ral Corren said. The barest nod. "You still breathe."

"For the moment," Tamsin Reedveil – quick-sworn squire, quartermaster, and occasional conscience – replied. "Welcome to Greybarrow, Ral. You took your time."

He glanced up at the sky. The sun was a pale smear behind high cloud, thin and cold. Higher still, if you knew where to look, a star clung stubbornly to the daylight: a tiny, wrong point of faint pallor that did not belong there at all.

"The road was unkind," he said. "And you said 'if you can.'"

"That I did." She wiped her hands on her jack and stepped closer. The villagers parted around her with the awkwardness of people trying very hard *not* to look like they're giving way. "They're spooked. I can't blame them."

Corren's helm hung at his side, hooked on his belt. His hair – what remained of it – had gone steel-gray long before his heart stopped beating. His face bore no rot, no obvious mark of death. Just a stillness, as if all expression traveled a longer road to get there.

"Choir?" he asked.

"Something like." Tamsin's eyes flicked to the chapel at the north end of the square, its bell-tower leaning like an old man who should have been allowed to sit. "They

sent word to the Chapterhouse: ‘walking dead, silent bell, strange singing by the fields.’ That’s what the priest wrote. Thought it reached you.”

“It reached us,” Corren said. “And twenty other such letters. We are fewer than we were.”

He swung back into the saddle, bone and plate and dead hide moving together as if they’d had a long time to practice.

“Walk,” he told the horse. The animal obeyed with the same measured cadence, turning toward the chapel.

Tamsin fell in beside them, boots squelching.

“You’re going to start there?” she asked.

“Where else?” Corren said. “If a bell will not ring in such times, it is either broken… or afraid.”

The chapel of Greybarrow had been built with more devotion than coin. Its stones were rough-cut, its stained-glass windows more patchwork than artistry. But someone had once cared enough to carve sunbursts into the lintels and chisel saints’ names along the eaves.

Now, those carvings were wearing thin, edges rounded by rain. Moss crept up the walls. The bell rope hung slack through the trapdoor in the ceiling, untouched.

Father Davorn met them at the door, wiping his hands on a cloth already stained with oil and dust. He was younger than Corren had expected; the letter had sounded like an old man’s hand. Instead, he found a priest whose beard had more black than gray, with calloused palms that spoke of work double his calling.

“Ral,” Father Davorn said, inclining his head just enough to be respectful without quite becoming a bow. “We did not expect the Order to answer.”

“Most do not,” Corren replied. “Tamsin says your bell is shy.”

The priest’s jaw tightened.

“It is… temperamental.” He stepped aside. “Come in, if you will. And you, squire.”

Tamsin smiled with only the corners of her mouth. “I walk in behind him, Father, not under him.”

Corren’s horse waited outside without tether, head bowed, an unmoving statue in corroded barding. The children watched it from behind their mothers’ skirts as if expecting it to suddenly bolt or bite. It did neither.

Inside, the chapel smelled of old incense and fresh oil. Candles burned on the altar, their light doing more for warmth than for illumination. The central icon of the Sun-Host had been repainted several times; traces of earlier faces showed under the current one like ghosts.

“The bell,” Corren said.

Father Davorn hesitated, then gestured toward the narrow stair beside the entry.

“It stopped ringing three weeks past,” he said. “No break in the rope, no crack in the iron. It simply… will not move for me.”

“For you,” Corren repeated.

“For anyone in the village.” Davorn’s mouth twisted. “Not in our hands. I tried to start the midday toll myself when the first walking dead came up from the old field. The rope might as well have been stone. The weight in the tower, the same. It will not move. And then—”

“And then?” Tamsin prompted when he faltered.

“Then we heard… other ringing.” Davorn’s eyes flickered up, to the rafters. “Far away and too close. Like iron bowls struck in a pit. Not ours. Not *his*.” He glanced at the icon.

Corren’s gaze drifted along the walls. There were frescoes there, faint shapes of old miracle-stories: the healing of a blind woman, a starving village fed from a single sack of barley, a saint standing between two armies, arms spread. They were cracked, paint flaking, but they were still there.

Under one, someone had scratched a small, crude eight-pointed star. The lines were shallow; the priest might not have seen it. Corren did.

“Who else hears the other ringing?” he asked.

Davorn swallowed.

“Some of the children,” he admitted. “A few of the older ones who play too near the old barrow-field. Sometimes a drunk, saying it in jest. Sometimes it isn’t jest.”

Tamsin glanced at Corren, then at the scratched mark.

“Villagers didn’t write to us about bells alone,” she said. “The letter said ‘walking dead.’ Where?”

Father Davorn’s shoulders sagged in real relief at the change of subject.

“The old field south of the mill,” he said. “Where they buried the plague dead, years ago. We burned what we could when the first… stirrings happened. But now they don’t wait for storms or eclipses or old songs gone wrong. They come in ones and twos, sometimes threes. Always with a look like they’re listening to something we cannot hear.”

“And Choir?” Corren asked. “Any sign of Cantors, or of their songs?”

The priest shook his head too quickly.

“We have no temple-fortress here. No priests of the Grave Star in open robes. We’re too small for their interest.”

“That is not what I asked,” Corren said.

Silence stretched. The only sound was the faint gutter of candlefire.

“We have no *openly* Choir,” Davorn said at last. “But people disappear into bad doctrine one at a time, Ral. The poor, the sick. Those who have lost too much. They don’t come to me with those confessions, not anymore. They go to the one who promises certainty.”

“And who is that?” Tamsin asked.

Davorn looked at a pew near the back of the chapel. Corren followed his gaze.

A man sat there with his head bowed as if in prayer. His clothes were clean in a way that spoke of careful poverty, mended but not ragged. At his feet, a basket of dried herbs and bandages. His face was sharp in the way of people who have learned to survive scarcity by thinking faster than their neighbors.

“That is Luthen,” Davorn said quietly. “He came two years ago, when the first of the new plagues hit the town to the east. He says he is a healer.”

“Is he?” Corren asked.

“In his way,” Davorn admitted. “He knows herbs, poultices, ways to ease pain when I could not. People go to him when my prayers fail them. Even I have, once or twice.”

Luthen rose as they approached, bowing a fraction deeper than Davorn had.

“Ral,” he said. His voice had the smoothness of someone used to speaking both to the desperate and to those who make them desperate. “An honor. I never thought the Order would bother itself with a place as small as Greybarrow.”

Corren studied him.

“How fortunate for you, then,” he said. “You arrived two years ago. Where from?”

“Nowhere worth naming, sir knight,” Luthen replied with practiced humility. “A village that doesn’t exist anymore. Plague took it. I learned to save who I could. I swore I’d not waste that learning.”

Tamsin’s eyes dipped to the basket.

“Those herbs,” she said. “Pale root. Ashflower. Grave-moss. Those are not all for *healing*.”

“No,” Luthen agreed. “Some are for letting go. Pain is an enemy too. Not all battles are won by keeping people in them.”

Corren considered the man, the bell, the tiny scratched star.

“You will take us to the barrow-field,” he said. “You, Father Davorn, and whoever else is brave enough to walk among the dead with a dead man.”

“It’s not wise. It’s almost sundown—” Luthen began.

Corren turned his head – just his head – and that was enough to still any protest. The unnatural smoothness of the motion, the lack of micro-flinches humans do without thinking, the way his eyes did not blink for too many heartbeats… it all brushed against something primal.

“Sundown is when they walk,” Corren said. “And I have ridden two days without rest. We will see the field, and then I will decide how much of this village is still yours.”

Tamsin gave Luthen a thin, apologetic but not really apologetic smile.

“You heard him,” she said. “Bring your best herbs, healer. If something gets back up that shouldn’t, I prefer the ones that keep it down.”

The old barrow-field lay beyond the mill, where the land rose slightly and the soil turned stony. Not a proper graveyard; those were for families who could afford stone and space. This was a mass trench once, dug in haste when plague carts lined the lane and the bell did nothing but ring and ring.

The mounds had settled unevenly. Grass grew in patchy tufts. A few simple markers poked up – wooden posts, mostly rotten; a stone or two with nothing carved, just weight.

The sun sagged toward the horizon, red and low. The little wrong star of Athrakar clung more clearly now, pale above the line of trees.

“Here,” Father Davorn said, stopping at the edge of the field. “This is where we burned the first set of corpses that rose. But the ground has never felt… quiet since.”

Corren dismounted. His horse stood as if rooted. He walked between the mounds, each step careful, as if respecting territory.

The air had that strange, flat quality fields of the dead sometimes get: sound slightly muffled, smells faintly wrong, as if someone had taken ordinary air and wrung something living out of it.

Tamsin followed, her shield on her arm now, hand near her hilt. Luthen trailed them, basket cradled, eyes flicking too often to the star.

“There,” Tamsin murmured, pointing with her chin. “Ground’s fresher. Soil kicked up.”

A patch near the center of the field had been disturbed. Not freshly dug in the honest way, no neat spade work. More like something beneath had pushed, then thought better of it. The earth was heaved, then tamped hastily by hand.

Corren knelt, gauntlets brushing away loose soil. Beneath the top layer, he saw the web of small rootlets that built themselves through grave dirt over time. They had been torn. Something *had* tried to come up.

He pushed deeper, feeling for cloth, bone, decomposition. His fingers brushed something smooth and cool: metal, not bone. He closed his hand around it and pulled.

A small iron bell came up in his grip, no larger than a man’s fist. Its clapper was bound with stained cloth. Symbols scratched along its rim glimmered faintly in the failing light: a circle, a broken cross, a small eight-pointed star repeated in a ring.

Father Davorn sucked in a breath.

“That is not mine,” he said.

“No,” Corren agreed. “It is theirs.”

Luthen's jaw worked.

"It's just a charm," the healer said quickly. "A way to keep the restless from clawing out too often. In some places, they bind little bells like that and bury them shallow. When the dead stir, the ringing warns—"

"Warns *whom*?" Corren asked softly, thumb brushing the etched star. "The living? Or the ones who listen for such music?"

Luthen hesitated, then fell silent.

The sky darkened by degrees. The first chill fingers of night crawled through the grass. Far off, a dog started barking, then whined into silence.

Corren stood, holding the bell up. The bound clapper made no sound.

"Tamsin," he said.

"Ral?" she answered, tightening her grip on shield and sword.

"When I move the cloth," he said, "be ready."

He gave Father Davorn a look. "If your god still watches, ask him to listen."

Davorn swallowed and began a Sun-Host prayer under his breath, voice low and earnest, hands clenched on his book.

Corren peeled the cloth from the bell's clapper.

The first motion of the iron tongue made no sound, at least not to the living ear. Tamsin felt it instead as a pressure in her chest, like the moment before you cough. The second swing brought a whisper, too high and thin to be called a tone.

The third motion rang.

It was not loud. It was not rich. It was a dull, flat toll, as if someone had struck a bowl in a cellar. But the sound went *down* instead of out. It sank into the earth like a dropped stone into water.

Around them, the grass shivered though no wind blew.

The nearest mound shifted. Soil cracked, settling.

"Of course," Tamsin muttered, bringing her shield up. "Of course we do this the hard way."

Hands broke the surface first: stiff, gray, nails black. Then faces, shallowly buried, pushing through dirt with terrible slowness. Their eyes opened, sockets filled with faint pale light, like distant star-glow.

One, then three, then seven. More in the distance.

The dead of Greybarrow's plague years dragged themselves up to their knees, then to their feet, moving with the terrible patience of things that have learned there is no need to hurry, ever again.

Father Davorn's prayer faltered into silence. Luthen stared, knuckles white on his basket.

Corren watched them, bell still in hand. His own face did not change; if anything, some tension eased there, as if a question had finally answered itself.

"Listen," he said softly, to Tamsin more than anyone.

Under the low wind, under the shuffle of grave-dirt, there was a faint *hum*. Not from the bell. From the dead.

They were not groaning. Not moaning, wailing, clacking their teeth in the crude ways most witless corpses did. Their jaws moved in small, repeated motions, as if speaking very quiet, very steady words.

"Choir," Tamsin breathed.

"Choir," Corren agreed.

He walked toward them, sword still sheathed.

"Who sings for you?" he asked the nearest corpse. It had been a woman once – a farmer, by the look of her – hair long gone, clothes tattered to rags. Her eyes swiveled toward him. It was like being looked at through water.

"The Star," she whispered. Her voice was like dry leaves. "The Star sings. We hum along."

Father Davorn made a strangled noise.

“You were baptized in the Sun’s name,” he said. “Elga. I remember you; I buried your family myself.”

“The Sun burned and left us hungry,” the dead woman said. “The Star cools and leaves us quiet.”

Her jaw moved again, falling back into that collective hum.

Corren lifted the bell.

“This is not your bell,” he told them. “Its song is not for you. It is for those who called you up.”

He turned his head toward Luthen.

“Isn’t that right?”

Luthen flinched as if struck.

“I only meant to keep them from tearing through the soil!” he protested. “We can’t bury them deep enough. The old trenches collapsed. I put in the bells so they would ring if something stirred. So we’d know. So we’d —”

“So *they’d* know,” Corren said calmly. “The ones who listen from under-temples and deep cells. The Cantors who count how many bells a village will give them. That sigil is not some hedge-witch ward, Luthen.”

His voice was still mild, but the air around him felt colder.

“How long have you written to them? How long have you hummed that song with the corpses?”

Luthen’s eyes flicked between Corren and the dead.

“I saved lives,” he said. “More than Father Davorn ever could, with his old prayers and slow comforts. I eased pain. I kept the plague from running straight through this village the way it did mine. And when the Choir wrote back—”

He cut himself off too late.

Tamsin snorted.

“There it is,” she said. “A Choir letter in your chest and a Choir bell in the ground.”

Father Davorn stepped back as if Luthen had suddenly grown claws.

“Is this true?” the priest asked. “You swore to the Host you were only a healer. You prayed with us.”

“I prayed to *someone*,” Luthen snarled. “The Sun ignored us. The plagues kept coming. The dead kept walking. Athrakar answered. His priests sent medicine. Methods. Rites to keep the dead from rising uncontrolled.”

He gestured at the humming corpses.

“See? They stand. They are calm. They do not tear, they do not bite. They only hum. Quiet, like they should have been allowed to be in life.”

Corren regarded him in silence for a long moment.

“You bought calm with bells that call the Choir,” he said. “Do you think they gave you that for free?”

Luthen’s mouth opened, shut.

“We are too small for temple-fortresses,” he muttered. “We are not worth a crusade. They use us as a listening post, nothing more. In exchange, we live.”

“For now,” Corren agreed. “Until some Precentor someplace decides the bell-chimes are ripe enough to cut down and stack in a trench according to their pretty patterns.”

Tamsin took a step closer to Luthen, her eyes hard.

“Did you write that letter to the Chapterhouse too?” she asked. “Or was that Father Davorn’s doing?”

“I wrote it,” Davorn said, before Luthen could answer. His voice shook, with anger or fear, it was not yet clear. “Without showing it to him. I thought… if the Order would not answer, then at least I had tried. It seems both powers chose to notice us.”

Corren watched the dead. They watched him back, or rather, oriented their faces at him. Their eyes did not *focus* in the way the living did. But the hum shifted in tone when he moved, like a choir adjusting to a new conductor's gesture.

"If we leave them like this," he said, "they will stand here until the Choir comes to collect. Or until the Grave Star's influence grows enough that they no longer need permission."

"And if you don't?" Luthen asked. "You'll burn them? They were my patients, my neighbors' families. They do no harm now. You'll set them alight for what they might become."

Corren turned the bell in his hand, feeling the etched sigils under his thumb.

"I will put them properly to rest," he said, "if I can. Failing that, yes—I will burn them, or break them, or take their heads off one by one. Because what they are now is not a victory. It is a *promise*."

He looked at Father Davorn.

"Can you consecrate this field again?" he asked. "Honestly, priest. Not in words, but in will."

Davorn stared at the mass of humming dead. There were faces he recognized there, eyes hollowed of recognition but still arranged in patterns he had known at market, at weddings, at funerals.

"I do not know," he said. "I have never known less what my prayers are worth."

"Good," Corren said, surprising him. "Honesty is a beginning."

He offered Davorn the bell.

"Take it," he said. "Hold it in both hands. Speak the strongest blessing you can remember, from when you still believed. I will do the rest."

"What will you do?" Tamsin asked warily.

"What I was made to do," Corren replied. "Stand between the dead and the wrong kind of stillness."

They formed a rough circle: Corren, Tamsin, Father Davorn, Luthen on the edge, the humming corpses in a wider ring.

Davorn took the bell. It shook in his hands.

"Sun-Host," he whispered. "Bright one. Old names. New names. I have no eloquence left. If you still hear, hear this: these were my people. They died in fear. Do not let them be used."

No grandeur. No poetry. Just a raw, hoarse plea.

Corren drew his sword at last.

The blade was a simple thing, without ornament. Never mind the stories; death-knights rarely carried shining relic-swords. Most carried the weapon that fit their hand best, the one that had killed them or nearly so. This was that blade: nicked in familiar places, grip worn smooth.

"Listen to your priest," Corren told the dead. "Not the Star."

The corpses kept humming.

Corren's other hand went to the small reliquary at his belt: a shard of broken sun-plate, once part of a saint's armor, now cracked and darkened. He thumbed its edge.

"In life, I served the Marches," he said softly, old reflex pulling the words from him. "In death, I serve the Order. In both, I stand against the Choir."

He lifted his voice just enough that the dead and the living both heard the next words.

"I am Ral Corren. I died once. I will not let you be taken for a second death."

He did not call on the Sun-Host. The last time he had, the answer had come too late. Instead, he simply stepped forward and swung.

Tamsin, who knew him, who had seen him fight, realized halfway through the motion that he was not simply cutting at the nearest corpse. The angle was wrong for that. It was too broad, too sweeping.

He was aiming for the **song**.

His blade cut through air above the nearest heads, tracing a circle. As it passed, the humming wavered. Not because he touched their bodies, but because the motion of his dead arm, the weight of undeath bound by oath and relic, disturbed something unseen.

The Grave Star was in the sky. Its song, faint as it was, met the stubborn echo of ritual that still clung to the Ral's existence. The clash made a sound like a chord played wrong.

Some of the corpses flinched. One staggered and fell, hum breaking off into silence. The moment its sound ceased, the others hesitated, like singers thrown off by a missing note.

"Now, Father," Corren said.

Davorn lifted the bell and rang it.

It fought him at first, heavy as sin. Then, somewhere between the second and third stroke, it relinquished. The iron tongue swung free, clanging out a wild, discordant peal.

The sigils along its rim flared dull red, then cracked. A sour, burnt-metal smell rushed out.

The corpses cried out as one. Not words, not the quiet hum. An animal sound, pulled from throats that had forgotten how.

Some collapsed at once, strings cut. Others staggered, clutching their skulls, as if trying to hold their song in. One reached for Luthen, fingers like hooks; Tamsin stepped in and took its arm clean at the elbow with her short sword.

"Back!" she barked. "Back or down, your choice!"

Luthen stumbled away, face white.

Corren moved through the field with grim economy. Time slowed, narrowed; the world shrank to blade arcs and dead faces.

Where the hum held strongest, he cut. Where it faltered, he stepped past. Each strike was not merely into bone and rotted tendon, but into the pattern trying to hold them up. The Order's rite hummed in him – a counter-song, faint but stubborn.

He was not a priest. He was not a sorcerer. He was a weapon shaped to do one specific thing: stand in the place where the Grave Star's influence met human dead, and say *no* with steel.

By the time the bell's last wild ring faded, most of the corpses lay still. Those that remained upright stood swaying, hum shredded down to a thin, confused murmur.

"Father," Corren called. "Again."

Davorn rang the bell a second time. This time it rang clean. No red flare. The eight-pointed stars along its rim blackened, lines burning away.

The remaining corpses crumpled.

Silence fell over the barrow-field. Real silence, not the heavy, listening pause from before. Just the sound of the night wind and Tamsin's breathing, a little too fast.

Luthen sank to his knees.

"You've damned us," he whispered. "They'll know. The Choir will know their bells went wrong. They'll come to see why. We were beneath notice. We were safe. You—"

"No one is beneath notice forever," Corren said tiredly. "You were only beneath notice *for now*."

He stooped, picked up the bell from Davorn's shaking hands, and examined it. The sigils were gone. It was just a piece of iron now, common as any farm chime.

He dropped it to the ground and put his boot through it.

“Tonight, your dead sleep as they should,” he said. “Tomorrow, we deal with the Choir that thought to number them like sheep.”

He looked toward the village. Lights glimmered between the houses. The wrong star hung above them, watching.

“This is not finished,” he murmured.

Tamsin cleaned her blade on a scrap of old shroud.

“Part of it is,” she said. “They’re down. That’s something.”

“It is,” Corren agreed. “But Luthen is right about one thing.”

“And that is?” she asked.

“We have rung a bell they will hear,” he said. “Now we wait to see who comes to answer.”

BOOK II — CHARACTERS OF THE DAMNED

Chapter 1: Creating Your Ral Protagonist

> "You were someone before you died.
> You are something else, now.
> Character creation is choosing which pieces of both still matter."

The Order of Ral is not a loose band of nameless monsters.

Every Ral is a story with a before and an after:

- The **before**: a living knight, lord, paladin, road-warden, inquisitor, or champion shaped by a mortal life in the Broken Age.
- The **after**: an undead death-knight bound to the Order, riding an undead war-horse under a pale and failing sky.

Character creation in *The Order of Ral* is the process of deciding:

- Who you were when your heart still beat.
- What survived the grave.
- What the grave added.
- How you move through a world that fears you, needs you, and may outlive you.

This chapter gives you a **step-by-step path** to shaping your Ral Protagonist, from first concept to full sheet. Later chapters (Attributes, Skills, Traits, Boons, Magick, Corruption, Strongholds) will expand on each piece in detail.

Here, we focus on the **full shape of the thing**: how all the parts fit together into an armored figure riding out under the Grave Star.

The Shape of a Ral: Step-by-Step Overview

You begin as a **human knight**—once-living, now dead and bound.

Mechanically, you are built with the same bones as any One-on-One Protagonist:

- Six Attributes (MGT, GRC, END, AWR, INT, PRE),
- A list of Skills with d100 values,
- A pool of **Destiny**,
- Tools and gear,
- At least one **Companion**,
- And a home Stronghold: your **Chapterhouse**.

What makes a Ral different is **why** those numbers matter:

- Your **Archetype** is not a class you will grow out of; it is the ghost of the life that led you to the rite.
- Your **Essence** is not just mana—it is the thin, burning resource that lets Faith and Sorcery function in a world being pulled toward the Grave Star.
- Your **Skills** are not only talents; they are the habits that survived death.

- Your **Destiny** is not general "luck"; it is the rare moment when you refuse Quietus by pure narrative force.

The ten steps below are the scaffolding for that story.

STEP 1 — Choose Your Background (Your Archetype)

Before you were a death-knight, you were someone.

A **Sun-Host Paladin** sworn to a now-silent saint.
A **Border March Warden** who rode the wild margins until something in the dark rode back.
A **Fallen Lord of War** who lost a kingdom and refused to die with it.
A **Grave-Road Templar** whose life was spent guarding relic processions and pilgrimage roads.
And other Archetypes introduced in their own chapter.

Your Archetype is:

- The **profession and life** you had when living.
- The **lens** through which you faced your first deaths—your own, and others'.
- The **package** of baseline Skills, Traits, Gear, and Assets that define your starting place.

In the fiction, you still remember that life:

- Old comrades may recognize you through the helm.
- Former lords or enemies may know your banner and your sins.
- Your habits in battle, court, and chapel are still shaped by those years.

In creation:

- Choose one Archetype from those presented (or work with the Director to define a new one consistent with the Order's tone).
- Read its **lore section**—the history, mindset, and signature burdens of that path.
- Note the **starting Skills**, **two Archetype Traits**, and **starting Gear & Assets** attached to it.

You are now **Ral [Name]** , formerly **[Archetype] of [somewhere]**.
Write both on your sheet. Both will matter.

STEP 2 — Generate Your Primary Attributes

The world knows you as armor, horse, and heraldry.

The system knows you as six numbers.

Your **Primary Attributes** are the foundation of everything you do:

- **Might (MGT):** Raw power, forcing doors and men, melee force, intimidation through physical presence.
- **Grace (GRC):** Agility, balance, reflex, fine motion under pressure, precision in movement.
- **Endurance (END):** Stamina, pain tolerance, resistance to exhaustion and harsh conditions.
- **Awareness (AWR):** Noticing danger, reading space and formation, sensing ambush or subtler changes.
- **Intellect (INT):** Reason, memory, analysis, learning, tactical and strategic planning.
- **Presence (PRE):** Social force, composure, persuasion, deception, command, the weight of your tone even from a dead throat.

A Ral is not superhuman by default; death does not automatically make you stronger than you were. It **amplifies** what you already were willing to push beyond natural limits.

There are two ways to generate your Attributes, both drawn from One-on-One core guidance:

1. **Standard Array (Classic Method)**
   Assign these six values to your Attributes:
   70, 65, 60, 55, 50, 45.
   - This method is fast and reasonably balanced.
   - It emphasizes concept-driven play: decide what you were *best* at and what you neglected in life.
2. **Point Assignment (Module Rule)**
   Assign **345 points** across the six Attributes.
   - Minimum **40**, maximum **80** in any one Attribute at creation.
   - This allows more fine-tuned shaping of your Ral.
   - 40–49 = below-average strain point, 50–59 = trained mortal, 60–69 = exceptional, 70+ = elite, shaped by harsh experience.

Whichever method you use:

- Record all six values clearly on your sheet.
- Think about what those numbers mean in the fiction:
  - A Might of 80 and Presence of 45 speaks to a brute, terrifying in melee, less trusted to speak at court.
  - An Awareness of 70 and Endurance of 50 suggests a hunter-knight, quick to see a threat but not inexhaustible.
  - A Presence of 75 and Endurance of 40 might be a lord who talked others into doing the hard work and paid with their own frailty.

You died with these strengths and weaknesses. You rose with the same. Death did not make you perfect. It only made you *stay*.

STEP 3 — Derive Essence (Your Magick Power Pool)

In this setting, **magick** is not casual.

Faith and Sorcery both cost something **real**:

- The effort of calling upon a Sun that sometimes feels far away.
- The strain of drawing on Athrakaran patterns without being dragged under.
- The simple spiritual fatigue of living as an undead beacon in a world at war with its own dead.

All of that stress is modeled as **Essence**.

Essence is:

- Your **pool of power** for workings of Faith and Sorcery.
- A measure of how much you can push spiritual and occult forces before something breaks.
- A resource that **refills slowly**, through rest, rites, and sometimes terrible bargains.

Essence Maximum (Module Rule)

Essence hangs on **Presence**—your capacity to **hold yourself together** under spiritual strain.

- **Essence Max** = ⌈**Presence (PRE)** ÷ **2**⌉ (round up)

Examples:

- If **PRE is 41**, Ess Max = ⌈41 ÷ 2⌉ = ⌈20.5⌉ = **21**.
- If **PRE is 60**, Ess Max = ⌈30⌉ = **30**.
- If **PRE is 79**, Ess Max = ⌈39.5⌉ = **40**.

You begin play with:

- **Current Essence = Essence Max.**

Whenever you work **Faith** (prayers, blessings, exorcisms) or **Sorcery** (deliberate manipulations of Athrakaran-adjacent forces), you:

- Spend Essence as listed in the spell or working.
- Spend it whether the attempt succeeds or fails —effort costs, even when it's wasted.
- Risk additional fallout when Sorcery fails, as detailed in the Magick and Corruption chapters.

On your sheet, record:

- **Essence Max** (calculated from PRE).
- **Essence Current** (starts equal to Max).

Over time, this number will tell stories:

- Days when you rode back to the Chapterhouse with Essence dragging at zero, hands shaking, soul thin.
- Missions where you refused to spend Essence, choosing steel and stubbornness instead of calling on powers that might notice you.

STEP 4 — Select Skills & Set Skill Bases

The Broken Age is not kind to dabblers.

If you survived long enough to die and rise as a Ral, it is because you were already **skilled**.

In One-on-One, every Skill is a **d100 percentage value**:

- When you attempt something uncertain, you roll against your Skill (modified by context).
- There are no fixed Target Numbers; your Skill *is* your TN after ad hoc modifiers.

In *The Order of Ral*, your chosen Archetypes determines which skills you receive automatically, then the player receives an additional 10 Skills + their Intellect bonus that they may freely select from the Master Skill List.

Intellect Attribute	Bonus Skills
01-40	+1
41-60	+2
61-80	+3
81-100	+4

Note that **Specialist** skills are special and cost **2** when being selected. These skills tend to be more powerful or unique in the setting.

Every learned Skill begins with a **base value** determined entirely by its **linked Attribute**.

Skill Base (Module Rule)

For every Skill, calculate:

> **Skill Base** = ⌊**Linked Attribute** ÷ **2**⌋ (round down)

Example:

- If your **Awareness (AWR) is 55**, then any AWR-linked Skill begins at **27%** before you spend any points.
- If your **Might (MGT) is 70**, then Might-linked Skills (Blunt Weapons, Brawling, etc.) start at **35%**.

This means:

- High Attributes translate directly into higher baselines.
- You still need to **invest Skill Points** to become truly dangerous.
- The One-on-One resolution engine remains unchanged:
  - Roll d100.
  - Compare to your **modified Skill value**.

    - Interpret Degree of Success/Failure as usual.

During this step:

- For each Skill in the **Order of Ral skill list**, note its linked Attribute.
- Compute each Skill's Base value and mark it on your sheet.
- If you track space carefully, you can write:
    - "All Skill bases = Attribute ÷ 2 (down)" at the top,
    - And only write adjusted values in the Skill lines themselves.

These base values represent:

- The training of your mortal life.
- The muscle memory and habits that followed you into undeath.
- The fact that you do not begin as a blank slate in armor; you were someone competent enough to be chosen for the rite.

STEP 5 — Distribute Your Skill Points

Once the base is set, you decide what your Ral actually **leans on**.

The world knows you as a weapon.

Skill Points decide what kind of weapon you are.

Skill Points Pool (Module Rule)

You begin with a pool of **200 Skill Points**.

- Each point increases a Skill by **+1%**.
- You may invest in any Skills you like, subject to Director approval for Specialist Skills.

Starting Cap (Recommended Creation Limit)

To preserve meaningful growth and keep early play tense:

- No Skill may begin above **70%** after point allocation,
- Unless the Director explicitly permits it for concept reasons.

This is not a hard rule so much as a **tone guideline**:

- You are undead, but not yet a myth.
- There should still be fights you will almost certainly lose without cleverness, Boons, or Destiny.

Trained vs Familiar (Optional Tag)

For table clarity, you can mark:

- If you invest **10+ points** into a Skill above its base, mark it as **Trained**.
- If you invest **0–9 points**, it is **Familiar**.

These tags:

- Do **not** change rolls mechanically.
- Help everyone understand what you are known for:
    - "Ral Serin is Trained in Blades, Shields, and Command; Familiar with Faith, Thievery, and Herbalism."

During allocation, consider:

- Your Archetype: which Skills did you already receive a bonus in?
- Your concept: are you a frontline executioner, a tactical commander, a witch-knight, a hunter of Choir priests?
- The campaign type: more Stronghold play favors Stronghold Management, Scribing, Crafting; more road play favors Survival, Tracking, Streetwise.

Make choices that will hurt later—gaps in ability are where drama lives.

STEP 6 — Finalize Your Skills

The Order teaches many things, but not all Ral listen the same way.

At this point, your Skills have:

- Base values from Attributes.
- Allocated points from your 200-point pool.
- Archetype bonuses already applied.

Now step back and ask:

> "What do I actually *do* when everything starts to go wrong?"

A strong Ral Protagonist often has:

- **2 Signature Skills**
  - The ones you reach for first.
  - Examples: Blades, Shields, Sorcery, Command, Faith, Archery, Tracking, Streetwise.
- **2 Support Skills**
  - The ones that shore up common weaknesses.
  - Examples: Healing, Wilderness Survival, Lore: Choir & Heresies, Insight, Etiquette.
- **1 Survival/Travel Skill**
  - To keep you alive between battles.
  - Examples: Wilderness Survival, Navigation, Weather Sense, Riding.
- **1 Social Skill**
  - Because you cannot solve everything with steel.
  - Examples: Persuasion, Intimidation, Faith, Oratory, Deception.

Skill Access in The Order of Ral

All Skills listed for this module are **available** to you unless:

- Marked as **Specialist** (may require Director approval, a specific Archetype, or in-play training), or
- Explicitly restricted as **Forbidden** for Ral (rare, used mostly for Choir-only practices).

Once your Skills feel coherent:

- Mark any that are core to your **Archetype identity**.
- Note any that feel like **loose threads** you want to explore in play (e.g., low Sorcery on a devout Ral experimenting with forbidden texts).

You now know how your death-knight moves through the world **mechanically**. The next steps decide how much the world lets you get away with.

STEP 7 — Establish Destiny

In One-on-One, **Destiny** is the resource you spend when the story tightens its grip and you refuse to disappear.

In *The Order of Ral*, Destiny takes on a particular flavor:

- It is the moment you refuse to let **Quietus** take you yet.
- The flare of identity when Athrakar's pull would hollow you.
- The hand on a relic that does not reject you when it probably should.

Starting Destiny

Use the standard One-on-One starting Destiny rules.

- If you need a simple default: **3 Destiny** is a good starting point for most Ral campaigns (Director's discretion).
- The Director may adjust this for grimmer or more heroic arcs.

Destiny in The Order of Ral (Guidance)

Destiny feels most appropriate when spent to:

- **Preserve identity under pressure:**
  - "My name will not be just another line in the Hall. Not here. Not yet."
- **Protect someone under hospitality or oath:**
  - When you swore by your old banner or by the Sun-Host that no harm would come to them while under your roof.
- **Force a bargain to land fairly:**
  - With nobles, Choir defectors, relic-keepers, or even the Church itself.
- **Contain a catastrophic tell:**
  - Preventing the revelation that you are undead in a delicate social scene,
  - Or binding the consequences of a Sorcery failure away from innocents.
- **Push through the Grave Star's chill:**
  - When fear, exhaustion, or Corruption would otherwise make you falter.

Write your starting Destiny on your sheet. Treat it like what it is:

- Not a re-roll currency, but a **statement to the story** that your Ral matters enough, here and now, that the dice do not get the last word.

STEP 8 — Tools & Starting Gear

A dead knight without tools is just a memory.

Your **Archetype** defines your starting:

- Armor (usually some form of plate or heavy harness).
- Primary and secondary weapons.
- Mount gear (saddle, barding, tack) suited to an undead war-horse.
- Useful tools: maps, writs, relic fragments, alchemical kits, ledgers.
- **Assets**: a mechanical abstraction of wealth, favors, and material backing.

When you note these:

- Think about what has been **lost or damaged**:
  - Ancestral swords chipped and re-forged.
  - Heraldic cloaks burned at the edges.
  - Shields bearing badges of people who have already gone to Quietus.

Starting gear should:

- Emphasize your Archetype's role.
- Give you **enough** to begin play without making every problem solvable with equipment alone.
- Tie you back to your past: heirlooms, tokens from former lords, relics you were supposed to return and never did.

Record all listed gear and relevant Asset values. These will interact with Stronghold rules and Downtime play.

STEP 9 — Companion Setup

A Ral rides *alone* in the sense that no one else is like them.

But in practice, most Ral are seldom alone on the road.

From the Companions chapter, choose:

- One primary **traveling Companion** (or more, if the campaign style supports it).
    - A gravesquire, mercenary serjeant, hedge-priest, scout, ex-Choir defector, field chirurgeon, etc.

For each Companion, record:

- **Who they are** — archetype, name, brief personality.
- **How you are bonded** — debt, shared trauma, oath, pay, faith.
- **What they want** — something *they* are chasing beyond your mission.
- **What they fear** — Athrakar, poverty, obscurity, you.

Also note their **Relationship Tier**:

- Tier 0 – Wary
- Tier 1 – Professional
- Tier 2 – Trusted
- Tier 3 – Bound

Most starting Companions begin at **Tier 1 – Professional**:

- They know what you are.
- They know the pay or calling.
- They haven't yet decided whether to love you, hate you, or worship you.

Your Companions are:

- A tactical resource: using Assist, Screen, Anchor.
- A narrative spine: they give you someone to talk to when the dead are too quiet.
- A moral mirror: watching you drift toward or away from the Grave Star.

Write them on your sheet with enough detail that you can **hear their voice** when the Director speaks for them.

STEP 10 — Establish Chapterhouse Stronghold

No Ral is rootless.

Even if your Chapterhouse is half-ruined, besieged, or a single tower clinging to a cliff, it exists. It has:

- Walls and secret passages.
- Shrines and crypts.
- Yards full of training dummies and broken stones.
- Kitchens, forges, barracks, workrooms, and perhaps a single functioning bell.

In character creation, you do not fully build the Stronghold yet. That comes in **Book 3 — Strongholds of the Damned**.

Here, you:

- Decide **which Chapterhouse** you belong to (from those in the setting, or one you and the Director create).
- Record its **name**, **general location** (marches, border city, mountain, coastal ruin), and **current state** (crumbling, barely-held, recently reclaimed, besieged, etc.).
- Note any **key NPCs** you already know there: relic-smiths, chaplains, seneschals, scouts.

Mechanically, the Stronghold:

- Will have its own **Assets** (Supply, Hands, Sanctity, Wear).

- Provides access to **Upgrades, Events, and Domain Play**.
- Serves as the anchor for **Downtime, Penance, Relationships**, and **Base Life**.

Narratively, it is:

- The last place that will carve your name in stone if you fall.
- The first place that will know if you come back wrong.

Write "Chapterhouse: [Name]" on your sheet. This is the nearest thing to "home" your Ral has left.

Final Checklist

Before moving on to the detailed Attribute and Skill chapters, ensure your sheet shows:

- ✅ **Archetype selected** (your former mortal profession and its package)
- ✅ **Lineage / Homeland noted** (which kingdom, march, or culture you came from in life)
- ✅ **Primary Attributes recorded** (MGT / GRC / END / AWR / INT / PRE), generated by array or 345-point assignment (40–80)
- ✅ **Essence Max** calculated as ⌈PRE ÷ 2⌉, and **Current Essence** set equal to Max
- ✅ **Skill bases** written (each = linked Attribute ÷ 2, round down)
- ✅ **200 Skill Points** allocated with no Skill above 70% unless the Director approves
- ✅ **Signature / support / survival / social Skills** clearly identified by your choices
- ✅ **Starting Destiny** recorded (typically 3, unless otherwise set)
- ✅ **Starting gear & Assets** noted from your Archetype
- ✅ **At least one Companion** defined (name, role, desire, fear, Relationship Tier)
- ✅ **Chapterhouse Stronghold named** and its basic situation sketched (enough to inform tone and early scenes)

Once all of that is in place, you no longer have "a build."

You have a **Ral** :

- A dead knight with specific strengths and crippling gaps.
- A history that led you to the shroud and back.
- A pale star humming in the distance.
- And a fortress, a horse, and a handful of living souls counting on you to stand up one more time.

Chapter 2: Ral Backgrounds

Before they were called **Ral**, they had other names.

Paladin. March-warden. Lord of war. Grave-road templar. Knight of a vanished king. Every death-knight in the Order once belonged to a different world: a banner, a border, a creed, a household. Those lives are over, but they are not gone. They hang on the Ral like old scars under new plate.

In this setting, an Archetype is not a "class" you play so much as the life you dragged into the ritual with you. It is the weight of your past—what you were trained to do, who you swore to serve, what kind of battlefield first taught you the taste of iron in your mouth. When you undergo the rite and rise as Ral, all of you emerges wearing the same truth: undead knight, plate-clad, war-horse bound, Grave Bond sealed. But the path that brought you to that slab still matters.

A former **Sun-Host Paladin** does not see the world the way a **Border March Warden** does. One looks for lost miracles and fallen saints; the other counts fords and watches the horizon for dust. A **Fallen Lord of War** carries the memory of banners and broken oaths, the habit of thinking in companies and supply lines, while a **Grave-Road Templar** hears danger first in the silence of abandoned waystations and the absence of pilgrim songs. Each Archetype colors how you ride, how you judge, how you spend the borrowed time undeath has given you.

Mechanically, your Archetype is the starting shape of your competence and burden. It grants you a handful of base skills that reflect your former life, a pair of Traits born from years of habit and training, and a package of gear and assets that tie you to specific corners of the world—old lands, old orders, old debts. In play, it is also a prompt for personality: how does a knight who once knelt before a golden altar now reconcile serving from beyond the grave? How does a border captain used to muddy skirmishes feel about being turned into a walking legend of terror?

All Rals stand equal in the eyes of the Grave Star: armored dead who refused to lie still. The Archetypes that follow are the stories of who they were before the grave opened and the Order reached in. Choosing one is choosing what kind of life had to die to make your death-knight.

SUN-HOST PALADIN

(Former Holy Champion of the Burning Host)

Lore & Background

Before the Choir of the Grave Star made the world a place of starving shrines and silent bells, there were orders whose very armor caught the sunrise like a blade. The **Sun-Host** was one such order: a militant brotherhood bound to a solar saint or high god of light, fire, and righteous war. Their banners bore radiant discs, spears of gold, or crowns of flame, and their charge was to lead from the front whenever the faithful took the field.

A **Sun-Host Paladin** was more than a knight. They were a walking sermon: sworn to exemplify courage, honesty, and unwavering mercy toward the faithful. Their lives were regimented: dawn prayers, ritual purifications before donning armor, recitations of the creed before battle. Many saw the Sun-Host as

incorruptible—until the dead stopped staying dead, and divine answers became slow, uncertain, or simply absent.

When the undead tides rose and the Choir's first grave-choirs began to hollow out countryside parishes, the Sun-Host tried to fight in the old way: holy banners high, orisons blazing, steel and faith in perfect step. But the enemy did not break in the face of miracles. Sanctified steel still slew zombies and bone things—but the cost climbed, and the shrines they defended fell one by one. Worse, some of the Sun-Host's own commanders refused to adapt, insisting that "more faith" would suffice where strategy and grim compromises were required.

It is from the **disillusioned but still-devout remnants of this Host** that many Sun-Host Paladins were drawn into *the Order of Ral*. Ral Parthanus offered them a terrible bargain: abandon life itself but keep their vow of protection. The Sun-Host, who had spent their lives telling peasants that sacrifice purified the soul, suddenly found the logic turned on them. Many accepted. Some did so out of noble despair, some out of furious pride—"if the gods won't stop this, we will."

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Sun-Host Paladins are often the **most visibly paradoxical** members of the Order. Their plate is still chased with suns and rays, but the metal is cracked, smoke-stained, or permanently shadowed as if the light itself withdrew. They no longer feel warmth. The sunrise they once worshipped is now an aesthetic memory rather than a physical sensation.

This produces a peculiar personality pivot:

- Many retain a **strong, almost reflexive sense of liturgical correctness**—they still quote scripture, still bow to icons—but their faith can be brittle.
- Others become **fanatically focused**, treating the Order itself as the last true "church": defending the Chapterhouse and their fellow Rals with the same fervor they once reserved for their god.

They are often the ones who most keenly feel the **absence of answer** from on high. If they still wield Faith magick, it is as much a test of whether anyone listens as it is a tool. When miracles still come, they feel vindicated. When they do not, a Sun-Host Paladin may drift toward cold, functional zealotry.

In play, a Sun-Host Paladin Ral is a natural **moral lens**: constantly measuring the crusade against the Choir against the ideals of their lost order. They may clash with more pragmatic Rals, question the use of Sorcery, or be the first to propose martyrdom when all other paths fail.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:
Maintain exactly as defined:

- **Riding**
- **Theology**
- **Stronghold Management**
- **Command**
- **Blades (One-Handed)**
- **Shields**

Apply these as flat bonuses after calculating Skill Base from Attributes.

Traits (Sun-Host Paladin)

1. **Radiant Bearing**
    - Advantage on first social Test with devout NPCs.
2. **Last Light of the Host**
    - When you **publicly invoke your old Sun-Host creed** (reciting a verse, brandishing your holy symbol, or swearing an oath), gain **+10% to**

Command and Intimidate Tests against undead servants of the Choir and mortal heretics for the rest of the scene.

- Against strongly faithful but non-Choir NPCs, you instead gain **Advantage** on Theology-based persuasion to rally them to immediate defense or resistance.

Gear & Assets:
Preserving your existing text and expanding:

- Ornate but battered plate, holy symbol of a fallen saint, relic fragment.
- Knight's warhorse with faded Sun-Host barding.
- A fire-scarred copy of the Sun-Host rule, with marginal notes written in your own hand (roleplay asset).
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 2 – Knightly Remnant** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: recognition among older clergy and veterans who still remember the Sun-Host; doors may open in old garrisons, shuttered chapterhouses, and isolated hermitages.

BORDER MARCH WARDEN

(Former Defender of the Wild Frontiers)

Lore & Background

Border March Wardens were the thin line between "civilized lands" and everything else: haunted woods, raider kingdoms, wild hills, and monster-trodden moors. Each Warden was typically a **landed knight with a hard posting**—a tower on a hill, a fort on a cliff road, a fortified inn at the edge of a cursed forest.

Life as a Warden meant **constant low-level war**. There were no grand charges and shining tournaments; there were night raids, missing patrols, mutilated cattle, and the grim business of riding out in sleet to see what had come through the fog. Wardens learned to rely on **small, hardened men and women**, not shining ranks of levies. They kept track of local superstitions and weather patterns. They learned exactly how far one could pursue raiders before risking a line of arrow fire from an unseen ridge.

When the undead began to move, Border March Wardens were often the first to notice. A village that "went quiet." Wolves that wouldn't approach a certain valley. Travelers insisting they had seen pale shapes walking upriver against the current. Many Wardens tried to warn their lords; many were ignored. Some died with their towers; others fought on as their marches became killing fields.

Ral Parthanus saw in them something he desperately needed: **practical resilience**, an ability to function in darkness and bad weather when plans fall apart. Many Wardens, knowing that their marches were already lost, accepted the Ral ritual as a chance to keep doing what they had always done—patrolling, scouting, killing—without needing sleep or fear.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Border March Wardens become **the Order's field hounds**: tireless riders who can range far, track Choir activity, and return with hard evidence. They retain a frontier pragmatism that sometimes clashes with more liturgical or court-bred Rals. They do not trust rumors. They trust tracks, burn marks, and missing livestock.

Undeath shifts them less dramatically than some other Archetypes. They were already used to cold, hunger, and exhaustion; losing those sensations is unnerving but also oddly familiar. What changes most is their **relationship to home**: the marches they once guarded are often overrun or abandoned. The Chapterhouse becomes their new "border fortress," and its survival becomes paramount.

In play, a Warden Ral tends to be the **eyes and early-warning system** of the campaign. They'll volunteer for reconnaissance, insist the group takes terrain seriously, and may be the first to recognize when a village or lord is already compromised by the Choir.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Athletics**
- **Archery**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Stronghold Management**
- **Ride**
- **Awareness**

Traits (Border March Warden)

1. **March Hardened**
    - +10% to Endure Hardship in wilderness.
2. **Edge of the Map**

- When operating in **borderlands, wilderness near civilization, or along frontier roads**, gain **+10% to Awareness and Tracking**.
- Once per scene in such areas, you may test Awareness with Advantage to detect signs of undead or raider presence (tracks, disturbed earth, distant smoke) even if the Director would not normally allow a check.

Gear & Assets:

- Hard-worn plate, hunting bow, travel kit, borderland contacts (asset).
- Knight's warhorse trained to rough ground and sudden alarms.
- A bundle of old frontier maps and marked "dead zones," some now outdated and some still accurate.
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 1 – Hard-Posted Knight** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: scattered favors owed by trappers, foresters, and smallhold lords on the old marches.

FALLEN LORD OF WAR

(Former High-Born Commander and Battle-Lord)

Lore & Background

The **Lord of War** was once the kind of knight nobles feared to offend and enemies feared to face. In life, such a figure commanded companies, regiments, even full hosts. They raised banners, negotiated alliances, and stood beside princes and dukes on the eve of battle. Their plate was masterwork. Their steed was the finest in a stable of dozens. They dined with rulers and signed orders that sent thousands to fight.

The undead crisis broke many such lords. Their training and doctrine were built on **predictable enemies, human morale, and clear supply lines**. The rising dead did not desert, did not break, did not stop. Worse, the Choir began to twist entire armies: a lord of war could carefully plan a campaign, only to discover that half their vassals had secretly sworn to Athrakar, or that the city they were marching to relieve had already fallen and was now a charnel fortress.

Some Lords clung to glory, insisting that another grand battle would restore control. Others recognized the reality: the age of conventional war was ending. A handful chose to adapt ruthlessly—authorizing scorched earth, pre-emptive purges, and desperate gambles. Among these were the ones who listened when Ral Parthanus whispered of a different kind of army: a **tiny, unkillable cadre** of undead knights.

The bargain was appealing to a mind already used to thinking in campaigns and centuries. To a Lord of War, becoming a Ral meant becoming a general in a war that would outlast their dynasty.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Fallen Lords of War become **strategic anchors** for the Order. They think in terms of campaigns, supply, enemy intent. They often clash with Sun-Host Paladins over questions of acceptable sacrifice. They may also clash with more "small scope" Rals, who want to save every village; a Lord of War sees the larger board.

Emotionally, they wrestle with **the loss of status**. They are no longer lords in the feudal sense; their titles and lands may be confiscated, destroyed, or simply irrelevant. Inside the Order, everyone is "Ral "; former rank only matters if others respect it.

The tension between **old authority** and **new equality** makes for rich roleplay. A Fallen Lord Ral might try to commandeer mortal troops in the old way, only to discover that fear of undead eclipses respect for titles. Or they might find more genuine loyalty in fellow Rals than they ever did among fickle vassals.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Stronghold Management**
- **Warfare & Strategy**
- **Command**
- **Blades**

Traits (Fallen Lord of War)

1. **Born to Command**
    - Once per scene, may re-roll a failed Command Test.
2. **Battlefield Calculator**
    - When you have **a few moments to assess a battlefield, fortification, or marching column**, you may roll Warfare & Strategy with **Advantage**.
    - On success, you can ask the Director **one specific, tactical question**

("Where would the Choir strike from?", "What is the weakest point in this wall?") and receive an honest, useful answer framed as your character's insight.

- On a critical success, gain **+10% to the first Tactics or Command Test** you make in that battle.

Gear & Assets:

- Rich but damaged armor, ancestral greatsword, minor land rights (asset).
- Knight's warhorse bred from noble stock, still bearing traces of house heraldry.
- War-chest remnants: ledgers, old campaign maps, and correspondence with high nobility.
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 3 – Fading Magnate** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: lingering recognition in court circles; some nobles may still feel obligated, others may loathe or fear you.

TEMPLE WITCH-HUNTER

(Former Inquisitorial Knight of a Holy Order)

Lore & Background

Temple Witch-Hunters were **the edge of the knife** within their own faiths: armored inquisitors sent to root out heresy, forbidden magick, and pacts with demons. Their authority often came from sealed writs, stamped in wax with high ecclesiastical symbols. Their reputation walked ahead of them, whispered in taverns and sacristies.

A Witch-Hunter's life was a study in **paranoia, pattern recognition, and controlled cruelty**. They learned to read inconsistencies in testimony, lies in tone, and the smell of burnt offerings in the wrong place. Many were zealots. Some were reluctant but effective. A few were corrupt. All were feared.

When the Choir of the Grave Star began to spread, Witch-Hunters were among the first to realize that something **different and systemic** was happening—a conspiracy that threaded through nobility, clergy, and peasant covens alike. For some, this was validation: the world really was rotten. For others, it was a crisis of faith: how could their church have missed this?

Ral Parthanus recruited Witch-Hunters who had already reached the conclusion that the **old judicial process was too slow**. Petty heretics could be interrogated and burned; Athrakar's Choir required something else. Many Witch-Hunters saw in undeath a way to be impervious to the very horrors they hunted.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Witch-Hunters become **the Order's internal and external investigators**—sniffing out Choir infiltrators, spotting sorcerous residues, interrogating prisoners. They are often cold, focused, and disturbingly comfortable around torture chambers and confession cells.

Undeath changes their calibration in odd ways. They no longer fear the pain they once inflicted on others. They no longer fear hell in the same simple way; to many, they already live in something like it. This can either break them into **cynical monsters** or sharpen them into **grim, efficient tools** that still cling to a personal line they will not cross.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Theology**
- **Occult/Grave Lore**
- **Blades**
- **Intimidate**

Traits (Temple Witch-Hunter)

1. **Sanctified Hunter**
    - Gain +10% on Tests to identify **sorcery, curses, or undead influence** when examining people, objects, or sites.
2. **Interrogator's Eye**
    - When you conduct **formal questioning** (not casual conversation), gain **+10% to Intimidate and Insight** against the subject for the duration of the interrogation.
    - Once per interrogation, you may ask the Director if the subject is "withholding something significant" and receive an answer based on your character's read.

Gear & Assets:

- Blackened plate with etched warding sigils
- Knight's warhorse, inquisitorial livery

- Ironbound “witchfinder’s kit” (chains, manacles, sanctified brands, written warrants)
- Reputation as a hunter of heretics (can be asset or problem depending on the region)
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 2 – Sanctioned Hunter** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: access to sealed archives, inquisitorial cells, and informants in certain temple hierarchies—until they realize you are undead.

KNIGHT-HOSPITALLER

(Former Military-Healer of a Holy Hospital Order)

Lore & Background

The **Knight-Hospitaller** was a paradox in steel: equal parts killer and healer. Their orders operated fortified hospitals along pilgrimage routes, near battlefields, and sometimes within cities. They guarded the sick from looters and invaders, escorted caravans of wounded, and offered shelter to pilgrims regardless of coin.

Hospitallers learned to **triage under fire**—deciding who could be saved and who must be left. They became intimately familiar with the smells of infection and the sounds of dying men. Many cultivated a calm bedside manner as a kind of armor; stoicism was as important as their mail.

When the undead plague spread, Hospitallers were overwhelmed. Wounded who should have died peacefully **rose again**, stalking the very wards that had tried to save them. In some hospitals, entire wings turned in a single night. The orders tried to keep up—burning corpses, blessing graves, experimenting with new rituals—but they were losing.

Ral Parthanus saw Hospitallers as invaluable. An army of undead knight-healers, immune to plague and fatigue, could be the difference between a town surviving a grave-breach and becoming another Choir outpost.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Knight-Hospitallers are often the **moral conscience** of the Order, torn between mercy and necessity. They know how much suffering war causes, and undeath doesn't erase that knowledge. It simply removes their ability to feel the simple physical versions of it.

Some become **clinical and detached**, treating both allies and enemies as "cases." Others cling fiercely to compassion, insisting on spare rooms for refugees in the Chapterhouse, defending the wounded and weak even when it complicates strategy.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Blunt Weapons**
- **Medicine/Chirurgery**
- **Theology**
- **Shields**
- **Command**

Traits (Knight-Hospitaller)

1. **Battle Healer**
    - When treating Wounds **during or immediately after combat**, gain +10% to Medicine/Chirurgery, and reduce treatment time by one step (scene to moments, hours to a scene, etc.).
2. **Oath to All Who Bleed**
    - When you choose to **render aid instead of striking a finishing blow** (using your turn to stabilize or protect a downed ally or NPC), you gain **Advantage** on that Medicine/Chirurgery Test.
    - If you succeed, you may also gain **+1 Destiny** at the Director's discretion once per session, when this choice clearly endangered your tactical position.

Gear & Assets:

- White-and-crimson plate with the Hospitaller cross

- Knight's warhorse with modest but sturdy barding
- Healer's satchel: bandages, salves, bone-saws, suturing kits
- Standing goodwill at certain infirmaries and hospices (asset)
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 2 – Hospital Order Knight** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: access to hidden apothecaries and lay-brother networks who may still honor your old colors (even if horrified by your undeath).

RIVER-LANCE CASTELLAN

(Former Castle Knight Overseeing Bridge, Ford, or River Fortress)

Lore & Background

Rivers are the veins of kingdoms: trade, supply, and armies all move along their courses. A **River-Lance Castellan** was the armored guardian of those chokepoints—bridges, ferries, river-forts, and toll towers. Their job was to decide who crossed and who did not, in war and peace.

Castellans were half-administrator, half-warrior. They kept garrisons paid and sober, adjudicated disputes over tolls, and watched the waterlines for signs of unusual traffic. They knew the river intimately: seasonal floods, hidden fords, smuggler routes. In war, they became the **hinge on which campaigns turned**: hold the bridge, and the army starves.

When the undead rose, rivers did not stop them. Drowned corpses crawled out of shallows. Barges arrived with crews already dead. Bridges became battlegrounds as both living armies and undead hordes tried to cross. Castellans often died where they stood, holding gatehouses and towers until all was lost.

Some survived long enough to realize the conflict had changed shape. Their loyal garrisons were dead or turned. Their lords were compromised or absent. For those who accepted the Ral ritual, the river changed from a border between realms to a **line between living and dead territory** to be held or crossed at any cost.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, River-Lance Castellans think in terms of **routes, flows, and chokepoints**. They instinctively analyze where enemy forces must move and where they can be denied. They are also often meticulous about supplies, boats, and bridges—nagging the Order's quartermasters about repair schedules and timbers.

Personality-wise, they tend toward **structured, calm command**. They are used to long stretches of tension broken by sudden crisis. Undeath removes the physical fatigue but not the mental strain of waiting for something to come out of the mist.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Command**
- **Blade**
- **Polearms/Lances**
- **Awareness**

Traits (River-Lance Castellan)

1. **Guardian of the Crossing**
    - Advantage on **defensive Tactics/Command Tests** when holding or contesting **narrow approaches** (bridges, gates, mountain passes, etc.).
2. **River-Wise Commander**
    - When planning or executing operations involving **rivers, canals, bridges, fords, or ferries**, gain **+10% to Warfare & Strategy and Awareness**.
    - Once per scene in such contexts, you may ask the Director to reveal **one hidden route or risk** related to the waterway (e.g., "There's a ford they could use," "That barge can carry more than it looks," "The current makes a night crossing lethal.").

Gear & Assets:

- River-stained plate bearing the sigil of a keep or bridge
- Knight's warhorse trained for lance charges
- Fine cavalry lance, tower shield or kite shield
- Keys and maps to old routes, fords, or disused crossings known only to castellans (narrative asset)
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 2 – Gatekeeper Knight** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: lingering authority with ferrymen, toll-keepers, and riverfolk who still remember your command.

TWILIGHT TOURNEY CHAMPION

(Former Jousting and Melee Arena Knight)

Lore & Background

Where some knights spent their lives in border skirmishes, others fought in the **theater of war**: tournaments, jousts, and melees staged for the amusement of nobles and the affirmation of chivalric ideals. A **Twilight Tourney Champion** was a star of that arena: master of the lance couch, the tilt, and the after-bout courtly rounds.

They learned to read crowds as well as opponents: when to play to the stands, when to grant mercy, when to humiliate a rival to make a point. Behind the pageantry lay real skill: battlefield reflexes honed under controlled risk. But tournaments were also illusions—duels with healers on standby, melees with blunted blades.

The undead crisis stripped those illusions away. The "rules" that once governed violence vanished. No judges called a halt. No nobles waved silk scarves to begin. Polished lists became plague pits. Tourney grounds filled with refugees instead of tents.

Many Champions died in that first wave of reality. Others saw the writing on the wall and transitioned to real war. Those who became Rals did so from a place of shattered vanity or hard-won humility: if there were to be battles, let them be real and meaningful.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Twilight Champions are often **haunted by the contrast** between their old life and the present. They remember cheers, banners, and adoring glances; now crowds flee or hide when they pass. Some respond by becoming bitter and harsh, discarding chivalric pretenses. Others cling to a personal code even more tightly, insisting on honorable behavior amidst horror.

They are, however, **exceptional duelists and cavalry fighters**. The skills once honed in play now serve in deadly earnest. They also tend to be socially capable within noble circles; they know the faces, the etiquette, and the backstairs scandals.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Stronghold Management**
- **Blades**
- **Polearms/Lances**
- **Courtly Etiquette**

Traits (Twilight Tourney Champion)

1. **Arena-Bred Reflexes**
    - Once per combat, when an enemy you can see attacks you, you may gain Advantage on either your **defensive Test** or your **immediate counterattack** (Director's call which is more appropriate).
2. **Master of the Tilt**
    - When performing **mounted lance charges or formal duels** (even within the chaos of war), gain **+10% to Attack** and **+10% to Ride** for that exchange.
    - In social situations involving nobles who remember the tourney world, gain Advantage on the first Courtly Etiquette Test of the scene.

Gear & Assets:

- Highly ornate plate scarred from tournaments, heraldic colors faded
- Knight's warhorse trained for tourney and war

- Jousting lance (can be refit as war-lance), knightly sword
- Old tourney fame: nobles might recognize your name or colors (social doors open… or rivals appear)
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 2 – Faded Celebrity** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: invitations (or wary toleration) at courts that still hold faint echoes of the old world.

BLACK OATH ENFORCER

(Former Feared Knight in Service to a Lord's Dark Edicts)

Lore & Background

Not all knights served saints or queens. Some served **men with iron wills and tarnished consciences**—lords whose decrees demanded enforcement at swordpoint. A **Black Oath Enforcer** was the mailed fist of such rulers: collector of impossible taxes, breaker of peasant revolts, silencer of dissent.

Their armor was deliberately terrifying: darkened, minimally heraldic, a walking threat. They were given broad latitude and plausible deniability: "The Enforcer exceeded his orders," a lord might say, washing his hands while privately approving. Many Enforcers became brutal; some were simply ruthless pragmatists trying to keep order in failing realms.

When the Choir rose, many of those lords either **fell quickly** or made uneasy bargains with Athrakar. Enforcers were used to executing orders they did not entirely endorse; the creeping line between "harsh necessity" and "horror" was one they walked daily. For some, the Choir's growing influence was a step too far. For others, it was merely a new employer.

Ral Parthanus recruited those Enforcers who had **turned against their masters** or been betrayed by them—those with enough conscience left to recoil from serving the Grave Star, but enough comfort with violence to embrace undeath.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Black Oath Enforcers are **frightening even by Order standards**. They understand intimidation, coercion, and the machinery of tyranny. They also understand regret and guilt, even if they rarely show it.

Some seek redemption through their work: every Choir agent broken, every slave camp liberated is a stone removed from their soul's burden. Others double down, seeing themselves as necessary monsters standing between the world and something worse.

They are invaluable in **underworld and regime-change stories**—knowing how palaces actually run, how guards can be suborned, where torture chambers are hidden.

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Intimidate**
- **Blades**
- **Command**
- **Investigation (Criminal/Informant Networks)**

Traits (Black Oath Enforcer)

1. **Reputation of Dread**
    - When you leverage your dark reputation, gain **+10%** to Intimidate and Command against commoners, criminals, and minor officials who know or suspect who you are.
2. **Tools of Control**
    - When attempting to **coerce, bribe, or flip** corrupt officials, guards, or minor criminals, gain **+10% to Intimidate and Bargain/Negotiation** Tests.
    - Once per scene in a hostile settlement or fortress, you may ask the Director if there is a **likely weak link** (a guard, clerk, or sergeant) and receive an answer based on your past experience.

Gear & Assets:

- Blackened plate with minimal heraldry, built for terror
- Heavy warhorse with dark barding
- Massive executioner's greatsword
- A network of frightened informants and old "contacts" among gaolers, torturers, and city guards (asset with a moral cost)
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 2 – Lord's Former Fist** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: knowledge of secret cells, oubliettes, and execution sites in multiple cities.

GRAVE-ROAD TEMPLAR

(Former Knight Escort of Pilgrims and Holy Relic Processions)

Lore & Background

Grave-Road Templars walked the **bones of the world**: long pilgrimage routes strung with shrines, graveyards, and waystations. They escorted caravans of the faithful, relic processions, and sometimes condemned prisoners being marched to far-off sanctuaries or burial sites. Their mandate was to protect the vulnerable from brigands, beasts, and blasphemers.

Over years on the road, a Templar built up a mental map of **hidden shrines, half-forgotten wells, cave chapels, and ruined chapels** where travelers could shelter. They also learned that pilgrims brought not just coin and faith but also rumors, diseases, and sins. A Templar's job included mediation, discipline, and the quiet storage of many confessions.

When the undead crisis began, pilgrimage routes turned into **death roads**. Caravans vanished. Waystations became lairs. Relic processions were ambushed by things that wanted the relics for profane rituals. Many Templars died simply doing what they had always done: forming a shieldwall between unarmed travelers and the unknown.

Those who survived long enough to meet Ral Parthanus were often **exhausted**. They had seen too many bodies on the roadside, too many graveyards no longer at rest. The prospect of becoming undead was horrifying—but so was the idea of leaving the roads to the Choir.

After the Ral Ritual

As Rals, Grave-Road Templars are **pathfinders and guardians of routes**. They are the ones who remember obscure byways and ancient detours that bypass corrupted towns. They have a pilgrim's sense of purpose, now hardened by undeath.

Their personalities often blend **melancholy and stubborn hope**. The road never ends, but each safe arrival, each rescued procession, is a small victory. They may collect new relics and tokens, attaching them to their already-cluttered armor, creating a sort of walking reliquary.

They also have a complex relationship with faith. Having watched so many pray and die anyway, they may be quietly cynical—or quietly defiant: "If the saints won't walk, we will."

Mechanical Profile

Skills:

- **Riding**
- **Mounted Combat**
- **Awareness**
- **Stronghold Management**
- **Endure Hardship**
- **Blades**

Traits (Grave-Road Templar)

1. **Road-Worn Sentinel**
    - Gain +10% to Awareness and Endure Hardship when traveling roads, pilgrimage routes, and border trails, and Advantage on Tests to spot ambushes there.
2. **Keeper of Ways**
    - When planning or undertaking **overland journeys**, you gain **+10% to Navigation/Travel Planning and Awareness** Tests to avoid natural hazards and known Choir-controlled zones.
    - Once per journey, you may declare that you know of a **hidden shrine, safe house, or waystation** within a

reasonable detour; the Director places it and defines its current condition.

Gear & Assets:

- Dust-caked plate marked with many small relic tokens and badges
- Knight's warhorse used to long marches and bad roads
- Sword, heater shield, and a reliquary standard or staff
- Familiarity with hidden shrines, waystations, and safe houses on old pilgrim routes (travel asset)
- **Starting Wealth Tier: 1 – Road-Worn Knight** (see Order Wealth Table).
- Social Asset: recognition among innkeepers, shrine-keepers, and old pilgrims who have walked the same roads.

ORDER WEALTH TABLE

Use this table for the **Starting Wealth Tier** each Archetype lists. This is a **broad abstraction** of coin, portable valuables, and ongoing rights (rents, favors). You can pair it with a more detailed coin system or use it purely narratively. For more specific wealth descriptions, roll or choose an entry on the appropriate table that follows the general Wealth Tier table.

Wealth Tier 0–4

Tier	Title	Description / Typical Holdings
0	Penniless	Little more than armor and weapon. Debts or seized property. Any coin is counted in a few silver.
1	Road-Worn Knight	Modest personal gear, a few coins, perhaps a hidden stash or pawnable heirloom. No stable income.
2	Knightly Remnant	Decent reserves: a chest of coin, a few saleable items, favors owed by merchants or temples.
3	Fading Magnate	Significant holdings: rent from minor lands, investments, or backed letters of credit (not always accessible).
4	Broken Lordling	Once-great wealth now fractured: scattered manors, seized accounts, contested claims—immense potential, fragile.

Wealth Tier 0 — Penniless

"Little more than armor and weapon. Debts or seized property. Any coin is counted in a few silver."

Roll 1d10 or choose:

1. **Pawned Past:** You owe a pawnbroker or moneylender for the very armor you wear; miss a payment and they may send collectors.
2. **Temple Debtor:** A local shrine or small monastery fronted you basic gear; you are expected to repay them in service or coin.
3. **Garnished Pay:** Your former lord or commander seized your pay for "desertion" or "lost equipment"; you have only a handful of coppers.
4. **Looted Refugee:** Bandits or undead raids stripped you clean—your current kit is what the Order or a benefactor provided, nothing more.
5. **Family in Ruin:** Your household was ruined paying ransoms, bribes, or tithes; any inheritance is gone and surviving kin may resent you.
6. **Confiscated Lands:** You technically "own" a tiny plot or ruined cottage in a region now controlled by the Choir. It is worthless for now.
7. **Oathbound Poverty:** You swore a vow of poverty in a former order; you still carry almost nothing beyond what *the Order of Ral* issues.
8. **Gambling Losses:** Years of dice and cards left you with creditors and a bad reputation in taverns and barracks.
9. **Robbed on the Road:** A single disastrous ambush or betrayal cost you all savings and heirlooms; only your armor and weapons survived.
10. **Burned Holdings:** Fire (natural or enemy action) destroyed your home, storehouse, and any stored wealth; only scorched documents remain.

Wealth Tier 1 — Road-Worn Knight

"Modest personal gear, a few coins, perhaps a hidden stash or pawnable heirloom. No stable income."

Roll 1d10 or choose:

1. **Hidden Stash:** You know of a small buried box of coins and trinkets along a familiar road; enough to live modestly for a week or two.
2. **Pawnable Heirloom:** You carry a single valuable item—a ring, brooch, or dagger—that could fetch a decent sum if sold in a major town.
3. **Worn Purse:** You have a purse of mixed silver and copper; you can pay for basic lodging, ferries, and simple bribes without hardship.
4. **Loyal Innkeeper:** An innkeeper on a particular route owes you a favor and offers free room and board when you pass through.
5. **Merchant Credit:** A minor merchant grants you limited credit for gear and supplies, expecting repayment later "when things settle."
6. **Stable Friend:** A stablemaster in one town will care for your mount for free and occasionally provide basic feed or shoeing.
7. **Spoils from Old Skirmish:** You won a few serviceable weapons, a spare shield, and bits of armor from a past battle—nothing fancy, but sellable.
8. **Pilgrim Gifts:** Pilgrims and grateful villagers have gifted you small religious tokens and coins over the years; you can pawn them if pressed.
9. **Trusted Money-Satchel:** You keep a carefully hidden satchel sewn into your saddle or cloak with a small reserve of silver crowns.
10. **Chronic Underpayment:** You were almost always paid late or short, but kept a strict habit of saving a coin from each pay; modest, but reliable.

Wealth Tier 2 — Knightly Remnant

"Decent reserves: a chest of coin, a few saleable items, favors owed by merchants or temples."

Roll 1d10 or choose:

1. **Small Strongbox:** You have access to a small strongbox of silver and a few gold pieces in a trusted location (inn, temple, or ally's home).
2. **Temple Patronage:** A mid-ranking temple benefactor owes you; you can request modest loans of coin or equipment in the temple's name.
3. **Merchant Share:** You invested in a caravan or trade venture; when it is in port or town, you can draw modest dividends (if it still survives).
4. **Spare War Gear:** You own a second set of serviceable arms/armor, or a fine secondary weapon, which can be sold or gifted without crippling you.
5. **Jewelry Bundle:** A small velvet wrap holds several discreet but valuable rings, earrings, or chains—perfect for emergency funds.
6. **Knight's Credit:** Respectable merchants in one or two towns will extend **short-term credit** for gear and supplies due to your reputation.
7. **Temple Vault Drawer:** A minor drawer or niche in a temple vault bears your name; inside is a modest but secure stash of coin and relic tokens.
8. **Landless Income:** A tiny share of tolls, tithes, or fishing rights still trickles to you from a remote holding, worth a modest yearly sum when collected.
9. **Redeemable IOUs:** You hold several signed notes from lesser nobles or wealthy burghers; each can be redeemed for small sums or favors.

10. **Spoils Chest:** You have a travel chest containing captured banners, plate fittings, and other trophies that collectors or armorers will pay for.

Wealth Tier 3 — Fading Magnate

"Significant holdings: rent from minor lands, investments, or backed letters of credit (not always accessible)."

Roll 1d10 or choose:

1. **Rents from a Fief:** You still receive seasonal income from a small manor, village, or cluster of farms—if the region remains in mortal hands.
2. **Urban Property:** You own a townhouse or warehouse in a major city; it may be occupied by stewards or squatters, but can generate rent or be sold.
3. **Letters of Credit:** Several trustworthy banking houses or merchant guilds honor letters of credit in your name, up to a significant limit.
4. **Multiple Investments:** Portions of your wealth are tied up in caravans, ships, or guild ventures; some returns are regular, others sporadic.
5. **Art & Antiquities:** You possess a small collection of valuable art, tapestries, armor, or relics stored in a secure location; selling even one piece is lucrative.
6. **Patron's Stipend:** A powerful patron (lord, bishop, or prince) grants you a regular stipend in thanks for past service—at least until politics change.
7. **Retainers' Tithes:** A scattering of lesser knights or officers owe you annual gifts or duties, which can be converted into coin or service.
8. **Regional Influence:** Local guilds, councils, or temple chapters rely on your sponsorship; they will back your loans or projects up to an impressive sum.
9. **Contingent Inheritance:** You are in line to inherit a larger estate or claim—currently tied up in legal disputes, distance, or war—but it already grants some revenue.
10. **War Spoils Hoard:** In a hidden vault or secret room lies a careful hoard of war spoils: captured plate, weapons, precious metals, and trophies worth a small fortune.

Wealth Tier 4 — Broken Lordling

"Once-great wealth now fractured: scattered manors, seized accounts, contested claims—immense potential, fragile."

Roll 1d10 or choose:

1. **Seized Estate:** Your primary ancestral lands are currently held by another lord or the Choir; if reclaimed, they would restore immense wealth.
2. **Frozen Accounts:** A major banking house or royal treasurer holds a **large sum** in your name, but political or legal obstacles block access.
3. **Scattered Manors:** You possess legal claim to multiple small estates across different regions, many currently occupied by squatters or usurpers.
4. **Major Trade Stake:** You own a **large share** in one or more merchant companies—caravans, ships, or mines—that could generate riches if stabilized.
5. **Family Vaults:** Several known or rumored vaults hold armories, coin, heirlooms, and relics; some are lost, some sealed, some in dangerous lands.

6. **Dynastic Web:** Multiple noble houses owe your line feudal obligations or unpaid dowries; collecting them would mean enforcing decades-old promises.
7. **Royal Grants:** Charters, writs, and patents of nobility in your family's name grant extensive rights (tolls, taxes, markets) that are currently ignored due to chaos.
8. **Contested Title:** You hold documents proving your right to a higher title (count, margrave, etc.); another line disputes it, and the realm is in no state to arbitrate.
9. **Relic Trust:** A great temple or holy order entrusted your family with powerful relics or regalia; returning or leveraging these could bring immense political and spiritual capital.
10. **Secret Reserve:** A legendary "rainy day" reserve was hidden generations ago by your ancestors; you know partial clues to its location, and rumors suggest it could finance a private war.

These tables let you quickly ground each Archetype's **Wealth Tier** in concrete narrative hooks—property to reclaim, debts to settle, vaults to find, or income streams to defend—while still keeping money abstract enough to fit One-on-One's lean style.

Chapter 3: Attributes of a Dead Knight

> "We weighed your strength, your will, your wit.
> Then we killed you and weighed what remained."
> — Inscription in a sealed rite-chapel of a fallen Chapterhouse

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When you stood before the altar and surrendered your breath, the rite did not care about your titles, your heraldry, or the prettiness of your vows.

It cared about **what you were made of**.

In the One-on-One engine, that substance is expressed as six **Attributes**: broad measures of how you meet the world. In *The Order of Ral*, those same six measures become something harsher: proof of which parts of your humanity were strong enough to survive death.

Attributes do not change every time you swing a sword or exchange words in a hall. They are not drifting numbers. They are **anchors**:

- Every Skill base is derived from them.
- Many Tests call on them directly when you have no time, tools, or training to lean on.
- They tell the Director at a glance what kinds of scenes will challenge you and which will make you feel terrifyingly at home.

On the sheet, Attributes live as numbers from roughly **40 to 80** at creation:

- 40–49: weak or compromised; a wound that never fully healed, a life lived away from that demand.
- 50–59: competent mortal; trained, tested, but still human.
- 60–69: exceptional; a knight known for that edge.
- 70–80: elite; the kind of talent that made your name before you died, and which the Order remembered when it drafted your corpse.

In the fiction, they are more than that. They are **how you carry being dead**.

Below, each Attribute is described in three voices:

- What it is, in this broken world.
- How it feels at low and high levels.
- How the One-on-One mechanics lean on it.

Might (MGT): "The Weight You Bring to the World"

> "The grave has no muscle.
> The strength is all yours."
> — Ral proverb

Might is the raw, uncompromising **force** you can bring to bear:

- Driving a war-hammer through bone and plate.
- Wrenching a gate half off its hinges when the hinges will not yield to reason.
- Shoving a terrified man back behind cover before the arrows hit.

- Standing in a doorway and communicating, with posture alone, that nothing passes unless it walks over you.

In life, Might was muscle, training, bone density. In undeath, some of that remains, but there is also something else: the way your **body ignores limits** it used to respect.

- A Ral with low Might (40–49) is wiry or simply not built for brute force. They learned to survive on speed, tactics, or words. In armor, they tire their frame more quickly; in tests of raw shove and smash, they will always be the one bracing while someone else heaves.
- A Ral with high Might (70–80) is an **engine**. Their blows dent shields, their grapples feel like iron bands, and even after death their movements carry a sense of weight that unnerves the living.

Mechanically, Might:

- Sets the base for **Might-linked Skills**: Blunt Weapons, Brawling, Shields (bracing), Polearms/Lances, certain Crafting tasks, Siege & Demolition.
- Is rolled directly when:
    - Forcing doors, bars, or improvised barricades.
    - Holding a collapsing beam long enough for someone to slip through.
    - Grappling or restraining enemies when you go beyond normal technique into sheer overpowering.
- Often interacts with **Endurance**: a Might-heavy Ral can exert brutal force, but without END they will feel the cost in Wounds and Wear.

High Might does not make you subtle. It makes you the one everyone subconsciously looks at when someone says, "We'll have to break through."

Grace (GRC): "The Distance Between You and the Blade"

> "Steel does not think.
> Grace is what decides whether it finds you."

Grace is **movement under pressure**:

- Footwork in the mud as arrows fall.
- The shift of weight that turns a killing blow into a glancing strike.
- The steadying of your hand when you're drawing a bead from horseback.
- The ability to switch from plate-heavy charge to careful tread in a crypt without stumbling.

Living knights trained Grace in yards and tourneys, drills and dances. Dead knights discover that decay has to be **fought with control**:

- A Ral with low Grace (40–49) is powerful but clumsy in armor; stains and rents on their mail speak of blows almost dodged. They are more likely to rely on Shields, armor, and sheer brutality.
- A Ral with high Grace (70–80) seems eerie in motion—plate sliding through spaces it should not fit, movements precise where rust and stiffness should interfere.

Mechanically, Grace:

- Sets the base for **Grace-linked Skills**: Blades, Archery (aim and release), Stealthcraft, Thievery, some Riding applications, Acrobatics if used.
- Is rolled directly when:
    - Balancing on crumbling ledges, loose scree, slick roofs.

    - Dodging falling masonry or trapped scythe-blades.
    - Keeping your feet in stampedes or collapsing stairwells.
- Often pairs with **Awareness** for reaction: Awareness sees the threat; Grace dictates if you move in time.

Grace is what lets a dead knight, in full harness, move like they still remember how to be made of blood instead of iron and grave-chill.

Endurance (END): "How Long You Can Stand"

> "You have already died.
> Endurance is deciding not to stay down this time."

Endurance is **how much you can take**:

- Pain, exhaustion, hunger (or the memory of it), cold, heat, poison, infection.
- The bone-deep tiredness of days in the saddle, nights without rest, and hours spent standing watch over something that should not move.
- The grinding toll of Corruption gnawing at your edges, faith strained, lungs full of plague-wind.

The rite of Ral makes your body something more than flesh, but **not invulnerable**:

- A Ral with low Endurance (40–49) may not gasp for breath—but they will still feel damage, still stagger, still reach the point where their frame simply cannot carry the weight of wounds and fatigue.
- A Ral with high Endurance (70–80) can **weather**: they keep moving on broken legs, hold the line through nights of constant attack, endure the pressures of magick and disease better than most living men.

Mechanically, Endurance:

- Sets bases for **END-linked Skills**: Endure Hardship, some Athletics applications (long marches, swims), resisting environmental hazards.
- Is rolled directly when:
    - Resisting forced marches, exposure, hunger, thirst.
    - Holding consciousness at high Wound tiers.
    - Staying functional under poison, disease, and exhaustion.
- Interacts directly with **Wound and Wear** rules; Directors may call for Endurance Tests to avoid downgrades in performance when the fiction demands it.

Endurance is not about never falling. It is about **how many times you can get back up** before Quietus notices you are cheating.

Awareness (AWR): "The Space Around Your Body"

> "The dead do not blink.
> Some of us still notice why we should."

Awareness is your grasp of the **world in motion**:

- The angle of an alley, the way sound carries in a cloister, the smell of damp on stone that means the tunnel is about to narrow.
- The flicker at the edge of your vision that turns out to be a Choir sigil etched where it shouldn't be.
- The weight of silence in a forest where birds have gone quiet.

In life, knights with high Awareness were valued as scouts, captains, and bodyguards. In undeath,

Awareness becomes a **barrier** between you and countless stupid endings.

- A Ral with low Awareness (40–49) lives dangerously: they miss ambush cues, fail to notice how the Choir has salted the wells, and only realize the star-sigil pattern in the floor **after** stepping onto it.
- A Ral with high Awareness (70–80) seems uncanny: they halt before invisible tripwires, pause before stepping into just the wrong shadow, and sense attention long before eyes are felt.

Mechanically, Awareness:

- Sets bases for **AWR-linked Skills**: Awareness (if used as a Skill), Tracking, Streetwise, Riding (situational), Investigation, some Survival tasks.
- Is rolled directly when:
    - Detecting ambushes, traps, or sudden assaults.
    - Reacting in time to seize initiative or avoid surprise.
    - Reading battlefield layouts, spotting snipers, noting failing structures.
- Often feeds into Advantage/Disadvantage decisions: a high Awareness Ral is less likely to be blindsided unless they ignore the fiction.

Awareness is the thin line between "fell in a pit like an idiot" and "walked away muttering that something smelled wrong."

Intellect (INT): "How You Think in a Dying World"

> "Steel rusts. Flesh rots.
> Plans outlive both."

Intellect is **reason and recall**:

- Mapping a fortress in your head after a single walk-through.
- Remembering the hymn that disrupts this particular Choir rite.
- Spotting the flaw in a noble's argument before signing your name to a doomed pact.
- Piecing together that three small outbreaks and one missing bishop are not coincidences.

Death has complicated Intellect. Ral minds:

- Lose some warmth and spontaneity.
- Gain a harsh clarity, the ability to revisit memories without fatigue.
- Risk becoming **brittle**—over-planning, under-feeling.
- A Ral with low Intellect (40–49) trusts instinct and training more than analysis. They may be fooled by sophisticated lies, misread documents, or struggle with complex siege plans.
- A Ral with high Intellect (70–80) is dangerous before the sword is ever drawn: they notice patterns of Choir expansion, design campaigns, and puzzle out relic usage that would baffle lesser minds.

Mechanically, Intellect:

- Sets bases for **INT-linked Skills**: Lore: Kingdoms, Lore: Choir & Heresies, Lore: Arcane, Stronghold Management, Medicine/Chirurgery, Crafting, Siege & Demolition, Scholar, Investigation.
- Is rolled directly when:
    - Attempting pure reasoning under time pressure (solving ciphers, recalling complex doctrine).

- Planning multi-stage operations where a single failure breaks the chain.
- Understanding exotic relics or sorcerous constructions at a glance.

- Gives substance to **Study Time** and spell-learning mechanics: Ral with high INT have an easier time mastering new workings.

Intellect is what keeps a Ral from becoming just a very durable thug. Or what turns them into a terrifyingly competent war criminal, depending on the path taken.

Presence (PRE): "The Weight of a Dead Gaze"

> "Your heart does not beat.
> They still hear it when you speak."

Presence is **social gravity**:

- The way your voice carries in a hall.
- The steadiness of your tone in front of a panicking crowd.
- The subtle flex at the edge of a conversation that signals you will not be ignored.
- The posture you hold when facing nobles, peasants, Choir priests, or fellow Ral.

For a living knight, Presence was charisma, poise, intimidation, leadership. For a Ral, it is those things plus something else: the **unnerving fact of your undeath**.

- A Ral with low Presence (40–49) can still be respected, but they are not a natural focal point. Their voice is easily drowned out by louder, more forceful personalities. Their undeath may read as pathetic, uncanny, or simply disturbing rather than compelling.
- A Ral with high Presence (70–80) cannot be easily ignored. Rooms adjust to them. Soldiers step aside. Choir priests look away first, even when they should feel invulnerable behind walls and corpse-guards.

Mechanically, Presence:

- Sets bases for **PRE-linked Skills**: Persuasion, Intimidation, Deception, Etiquette, Command, Oratory, Faith (for many orders), Beast Handling, Insight (if Presence-linked in your table).
- Directly defines your **Essence Max**:
  - Essence Max = $\lceil \text{PRE} \div 2 \rceil$ (see Character Creation)
- Is rolled directly when:
  - Holding an audience's attention in crises.
  - Commanding troops or Companions under fire.
  - Forcing smaller spirits or lesser undead to hesitate.
- Shapes how potent your **Faith** and **Sorcery** feel; a powerful Presence does not guarantee success, but it defines how much you can attempt before your Essence simply runs dry.

Presence is the reason some dead knights become legends and others become rumors.

Mechanical Summary: Attributes in the One-on-One Engine

While most of this chapter is flavor, the mechanical backbone is simple:

- You have six Attributes: **MGT, GRC, END, AWR, INT, PRE**.
- You generate them using:

    - The **standard array** (70, 65, 60, 55, 50, 45), or
    - The **345-point allocation**, minimum 40, maximum 80.
- Every Skill in this module is linked to one Attribute; its **base value** is:
    - Skill Base = ⌊Linked Attribute ÷ 2⌋.
- Many Tests call for **Attribute-only rolls** when no specific Skill fits or training is irrelevant.
- Presence also defines your **Essence Max** via ⌊PRE ÷ 2⌋ and heavily influences your role in social and magical conflicts.

Attributes do not tell you *what* you do. They tell you **how you are built** to do it, and what breaks first when the world pushes back.

The next section—Skills—describes the habits and crafts that sit atop this skeleton: everything you learned in life, everything you honed after death, and everything that will decide whether your story ends in Quietus or in a chapterhouse song.

Chapter 4: Skills in a Dying World

> "Death took your warmth.
> It did not take your aim, your prayers, or your hands."

When people hear "death-knight," they imagine raw, unthinking force:

- A plated corpse swinging a sword until something falls over.
- An armored silhouette walking through arrow fire because it cannot feel pain.
- A thing that only knows how to kill.

The Order of Ral knows better.

Every Ral was once **alive**, and while alive they learned things:

- How to hold a shield line in the rain.
- How to read a border map and see where the next war will start.
- How to speak to frightened villagers so they do not bolt and run into the graveyard at night.
- How to cut, stitch, brew, pray, deceive, command, track, or negotiate.

Death did not erase those habits. It **set them in bone**.

In the One-on-One RPG System, those habits are called **Skills**: percentage values that describe what you are actually good at when the story stops being generous. In *The Order of Ral*, Skills are more than mechanical levers; they are the **crafts that survived your burial**.

What a Skill Is (and Isn't)

A Skill is:

- A **trained practice**: something you have done often enough that it leaves grooves in your mind and muscles.
- A **promise to the table**: "When this comes up, I will be interesting to watch."
- A **hook** for the Director: a list of ways the world will challenge you and give you chances to shine.

A Skill is **not**:

- A guarantee of success; the dice and circumstances still matter.
- A license to ignore the fiction; if you swing a sword underwater in plate, the Story will answer.
- A replacement for Attributes; they are built on those bones.

Mechanically:

- Skills are **d100 values**.
- When you attempt something uncertain, you roll d100 against your modified Skill:
    - If you roll equal or under, you succeed (with Degree of Success);
    - Over, you fail (with Degree of Failure).
-

- Any skill roll of 01-05 is a Critical Success/Hit, while any roll of 95-100 is a Critical Failure
- There are **no fixed target numbers** from the system; your Skill after modifiers *is* the target.

In this module:

- Every Skill has a **linked Attribute**.
- Its **base value** is that Attribute ÷ 2 (rounded down).
- You then allocate **Skill Points** (200 at creation) to raise Skills, usually capping them at **70%** at the start.

Those numbers are important. But the first question is not "What is your Archery score?" It is:

> "What did you spend your life learning before you decided to die on purpose?"

Skills as "What Survived the Grave"

Imagine the years before your rite:

- The dust of the training yard.
- The bitter cold of dawn patrols.
- The cramped light of scriptoriums and siege workshops.
- The smell of hot metal in the smithy, herbs in the infirmary, parchment in the chancery.

Every hour you spent in those places left a mark.

When you lay on the shroud and spoke your last vows, **not everything crossed the threshold**:

- You forgot some names.
- Faces blurred.
- Some tastes and textures grew very dim.

What endured were the **things you did most often and most seriously**:

- The way you set your feet before a charge.
- The rhythm of your breathing as you drew a bow.
- The steps of a field surgery you performed too many times to ever forget.
- The cadence of a prayer that stopped panic in a barracks.

Those are your Skills.

In play:

- High **Blades** is not just a number; it is the fact that your body remembers every fight you ever had, and can re-enact them with uncanny precision even when you no longer feel your own heartbeat.
- High **Faith** is not simple piety; it is the disciplined practice of calling on a God who has watched you die once already and may or may not approve of what you are.
- High **Lore: Choir & Heresies** is not trivia; it is survivor's knowledge of the songs and sigils that have already killed too many.

Your Skill picks tell the Director what kind of knight died in that chapel, and what kind of monster stepped out of it.

Skill Categories in the Order of Ral

For the purposes of mood and pacing, Skills in this module tend to cluster into broad **families**. These are not rules; they are lenses.

- **Steel & Blood**

    - Blades, Blunt Weapons, Polearms/Lances, Brawling, Shields, Archery.
    - The language of war and close violence.
    - Combat Skills define what you look like when the chapter's conversation ends and everyone draws steel.
- **March & Wilderness**
    - Riding, Tracking, Wilderness Survival, Weather Sense, Beast Handling.
    - The ability to move through a world that wants you lost, frozen, or eaten.
    - These Skills decide whether you reach the fight in time—or at all.
- **City & Court**
    - Streetwise, Etiquette, Persuasion, Deception, Intimidation, Insight, Lore: Kingdoms.
    - Navigating markets, courts, and the thin line between them.
    - These Skills decide whether you can secure allies, permits, and information… or whether the world closes its doors.
- **Lore & Mind**
    - Lore: Choir & Heresies, Lore: Arcane, Scholar, Stronghold Management, Investigation.
    - Understanding patterns, histories, and the invisible forces at play.
    - These Skills often show up **before** swords are drawn, in prelude and aftermath.
- **Craft & Care**
    - Crafting: Smithing, Crafting: Wood/Leather, Medicine/Chirurgery, Herbalism, Alchemy.
    - Keeping bodies, gear, and strongholds from falling apart faster than the world can attack them.
    - In a campaign with long arcs, these Skills are the difference between a fortress and a ruin.
- **Faith & Sorcery**
    - Faith, Theology, Sorcery, Exorcism & Banishment, Wardcraft, Ritual.
    - Reaching beyond the physical into the forces of Sun and Grave Star.
    - These Skills are always double-edged: they can save souls and just as easily doom them.

Some Skills are marked **Specialist**:

- They usually require:
    - A specific Archetype or teacher.
    - Time and narrative justification.
    - Director approval at creation if taken early.

Specialist Skills (like certain forms of Thievery, Siege & Demolition, advanced Sorcery) are hooks for **downtime training arcs, captive experts, or rare books**. They exist to reward campaigns that linger, not one-off delves.

Failure, Cost, and the Grave Star's Shadow

In any grim setting, there is a temptation to treat Skills as **armor against failure**.

In *The Order of Ral*, they are the opposite:

- High Skills mean you can **reach farther**.
- Reaching farther means you can **fail in more interesting, catastrophic ways**.

A Ral with 65% Sorcery and 35 Essence can attempt workings that would kill most hedge-witches outright. When they go wrong—and eventually they will—the consequences will be correspondingly stark.

The One-on-One engine encourages:

- **Degrees of Success and Failure** (DoS/DoF) rather than flat yes/no results.
- **Clocks** to track ongoing crises (Pursuits, Collapses, Choir Influence, Stronghold Wear).
- **Advantage/Disadvantage** based on fiction, not the raw Skill number.

In this setting:

- Failing a **Healing** Test might not kill a Companion outright—but might leave them with a permanent mark or reduced Tier of Relationship.
- Failing **Lore: Choir & Heresies** might mean you recognize the rite, but too late to stop it fully.
- Failing a **Faith** Test could mean your prayer is heard… but by something listening behind the Sun.

The Grave Star's presence gives weight to every roll. Skills are the way you argue with that presence:

- Every success is a small refusal of Athrakar's script.
- Every failure is an opportunity to show how much of the world is already under its influence.

Play into that. Let high Skills tempt you toward hubris. Let low Skills force you to lean harder on Companions, Strongholds, and terrible bargains.

Learning, Training, and the Long Road

You did not become a Ral overnight. You will not become what you are meant to be as a Ral overnight, either.

Over the course of a campaign:

- You will advance Skills through **experience and downtime**.
- You will gain access to **new Skills** (especially Specialist ones) through:
  - Training with Secondary Companions (relic-smiths, scribes, ex-Choir, field priests).
  - Capturing or rescuing experts and convincing them to teach you.
  - Studying in the Chapterhouse library, crypts, and labs.

Training always has **fictional cost**:

- Time that the Choir uses to advance its own Clocks.
- Essence spent in experimentation.
- Strain on Relationships with Companions who watch you toy with forbidden arts.

Mechanical Prelude: How Skills Work

The full list and rules follow, but as a reminder:

- Every Skill is a **percentage** (0–100).
- Base value = **linked Attribute ÷ 2** (round down).
- You receive **200 Skill Points** at creation; 1 point = +1%.
- Recommended starting cap: **70%**, unless the Director approves exceptions.
- When you act under pressure:

- Roll **d100** vs modified Skill (after situational ±10, ±20 and Advantage/Disadvantage).
- Compare roll to Skill to determine success and Degree.

- Skills interact with:
  - **Essence** (for Faith and Sorcery).
  - **Corruption** (when Sorcery fails, or when certain Skills are used in Choir-tainted contexts).
  - **Companions** (Assist, Screen, Anchor can modify Skill use).
  - **Stronghold** play (Stronghold Management, Crafting, Lore, Faith all contribute).

Core Resolution (Attributes & Skills)

Attributes (1–100)

Six Attributes: Might, Grace, Endurance, Awareness, Intellect, Presence.

Sometimes you roll directly against an Attribute:

– Roll d100 ≤ modified Attribute/2 = success.

Skills (1–100%)

Each Skill is a percentage linked to one Attribute.

Skill Base:

Skill Base = ⌊Linked Attribute ÷ 2⌋

Then you add Skill Points to raise that base.

Resolution Reference:

Test: roll d100 ≤ skill/attribute.

Contest: both roll; success beats failure; compare DoS/DoF.

Mutual failure: least bad gets a Lesser Win.

Adv/Disadv: ±10/±20/±30.

Destiny: +10 to you and/or –10 to them per point; stacks.

Degree of Success/Failure (DoS/DoF) Reference:

Modified Skill Value (MSV) = base skill after all situational modifiers (including Advantage/Disadvantage handling and any ± adjustments).

Degree of Success (DoS) = MSV – Roll (if the result is 0 or higher).

Degree of Failure (DoF) = Roll – MSV (if the result is higher than MSV).

Degree of Success Helps to Determine an Attacker's EDGE bonus (See **Combat & Harm**)

Advantage & Disadvantage (Quick Reference)

The One-on-One engine doesn't use fixed Target Numbers—you always roll d100 against your modified Skill value. Advantage and Disadvantage are how the fiction tilts that number.

Advantage = circumstances help you

Disadvantage = circumstances hinder you

The Director adjusts your Skill before you roll using three standard bands:

+10 / –10 — Notable help or hindrance

Good tools, clear time, steady footing

Mild pressure, light injury, slight distraction

+20 / –20 — Major help or hardship

Perfect setup, strong leverage, ideal position

Heavy rain, serious injury, panic, chaos, bad footing

+30 / –30 — Extreme edge or disaster

Overwhelming advantage, helpless target, perfect trap

Nearly impossible conditions, utter terror, total chaos

Multiple factors can stack, but as a rule of thumb the Director should cap total modifiers around ±30 and let the fiction do the rest. Use Advantage/Disadvantage to keep rolls honest to the situation, not to nickel-and-dime every tiny detail.

Critical Hits and Critical Misses

Any attribute/skill roll of 01-05 is a Critical Success/Hit

In combat, a Critical Hit inflicts an additional Die of the weapon's listed damage type

Any attribute/skill roll of 95-100 is a Critical Failure/Miss

A Critical Failure/Miss can have special detrimental effects for some skills; a Director may inflict an effect and/or Disadvantage, otherwise

Contested Rolls (Opposed Tests) — Quick Reference:

When two sides directly oppose each other (chase vs chase, stealth vs watch, will vs coercion), both roll d100 against their modified skill value (or the Director-approved Attribute benchmark if no skill applies). Resolve each roll as a Win or Loss normally, then compare:

If only one side Wins: that side wins the contest.

If both Win: the side with the higher Degree of Success (DoS) wins (cleaner control).

If both Lose: the side with the lower Degree of Failure (DoF) wins (a Lesser Win).

If it's effectively tied, advance the scene with a cost/complication (often a Clock tick, lost ground, exposure, or strain).

Directors should keep contests moving: a contested roll answers who gets their way right now, not every tiny exchange—use one strong contest, then narrate the outcome forward.

Chapter 5: Master Skill List

Steel & Blood

Archery (Grace) — [Combat, Ranged]

Archery covers bows, crossbows, and thrown weapons in a world where wind is tainted with ash and many targets do not breathe. It includes stance, breath, judging distance through fog or corpse-smoke, and picking shots that matter—eyes, gaps in barding, necromantic foci.

- Shoot at distance; precision shots at weak points
    - –10 / –20 for called shots against armored/undead targets
- Fire from concealment in ruined streets or graveyards
    - +10 if unseen and patient; –20 if firing on the run
- Long-range volleys over walls or at massed undead
    - +10 vs tightly packed hordes; –20 in high winds or heavy rain
- Hunt corrupted beasts for food or trophies
    - +10 with clear sign; –10 in dense fog or corrupted woods
- Shoot from horseback
    - –20 at full gallop; +10 with steady pace and trained mount

Athletics (Endurance) — [Physical]

Athletics is raw physical exertion: climbing broken walls, leaping grave-pits, swimming cold rivers, and forcing undead bodies to perform beyond what dry sinew should allow. Even as a Ral, gravity, weight, and leverage still matter.

- Climb crumbling fortifications or ruin walls
    - +10 with rope and time; –20 in armor under enemy fire
- Swim rivers or harbors choked with debris
    - +10 calm water; –20 in strong current or with gear
- Sprint in plate across uneven ground
    - +10 short burst; –20 over extended chases
- Jump gaps, trenches, or grave fissures
    - +10 with a running start; –10 in confined spaces

- Force doors, bars, or stuck portcullises
    - +10 with help and leverage; –20 alone and badly positioned

---

Blades (Grace) — [Combat, Melee]

Blades covers swords, knives, and similar weapons used with precision and grim efficiency. You already died once; you are not dueling for sport. This skill is about cutting down the Choir's servants, crippling undead, and parrying blows in cramped crypt corridors.

- Duel with swords or knives
    - +10 with reach advantage; –10 in very cramped space
- Parry and riposte against undead or armored foes
    - +10 when fully focused on defense; –10 if surprised or off-balance
- Target gaps in armor or necromantic bindings
    - –10 vs plate or heavy bone; +10 if enemy is restrained
- Fight in tight tunnels, catacombs, or stairwells
    - +10 with short blade; –10 with long greatsword
- Silent kills on living targets
    - +10 from behind or at rest; –20 vs alert sentries

Blunt Weapons (Might) — [Combat, Melee]

Blunt Weapons covers hammers, maces, flails, picks, and any tool meant to **crush** rather than cut. Against the Choir's armored priests, plated undead, and stone-faced idols, blunt force is often the surest way to break bones, warp plate, or shatter warded icons.

- Smash armor, shields, and undead bone
    - +10 vs heavily armored or skeletal foes; –10 vs nimble, unarmored targets
- Deliver stun or concussion blows
    - +10 vs unhelmeted heads or limbs; –20 vs full helms or heavy gorgets
- Break doors, locks, and barricades
    - +10 with room to swing; –20 in cramped corridors or while entangled
- Fight in shield walls or tight formations
    - +10 when striking over or around shields; –10 if allies crowd your swing arcs
- Use improvised clubs, mauls, or tools as weapons
    - +10 with heavy, well-balanced objects; –10 with awkward or fragile items

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Brawling (Might) — [Combat, Grapple]

Brawling is brutality without polish: grapples, chokes, throws, and the willingness to use your undead body as a blunt instrument. Bones break differently now; you can leverage that without fear of pain—but joints still wrench, and dislocations still slow you.

- Punch, elbow, or knee in armor-to-armor scrums
    - +10 vs unarmored; –10 vs full plate
- Clinch and restrain cultists or panicked civilians
    - +10 if larger/stronger; –20 if much smaller vs huge foe
- Throw or trip enemies near ledges, pits, or fire
    - +10 on firm footing; –10 on slick or unstable ground
- Choke-out or pin a target

    - –20 vs helm or gorget; +10 from behind or after a throw
- Fight while grabbed or swarmed
    - +10 if you gain leverage on one foe; –10 if pinned by many

---

Mounted Combat (Grace) — [Combat]

Mounted Combat refines Blades, Shields, and Riding into a single discipline: fighting from the saddle, using height, momentum, and your undead mount's resilience to dominate the field.

- Strike accurately from horseback against ground targets
    - +10 at controlled pace; –20 at full gallop in rough terrain
- Coordinate weapon swings with your mount's movement
    - +10 if you have Grave-Rider's Rhythm/Bond 3+; –10 on unfamiliar mount
- Use the mount's bulk for trampling, shoving, or line-breaking
    - +10 against lightly armored foes; –10 vs braced pikes/polearms
- Maintain balance while taking hits or performing sharp maneuvers
    - +10 when braced and expecting impact; –20 when surprised
- Fight effectively in close formations of cavalry
    - +10 with trained unit; –10 in disorganized mobs of riders

---

Polearms (Might) — [Combat, Melee]

Polearms govern spears, glaives, bills, and halberds designed to control space and punish approach—especially effective against undead hordes and cavalry, including your own kind.

- Hold a line or doorway against oncoming enemies
    - +20 with trained formation; –10 when totally alone and flanked
- Set against cavalry or large creatures
    - +20 if braced and ready; –20 if surprised or out of stance
- Sweep, trip, or hook opponents to the ground
    - +10 vs large or unsteady foes; –10 on uneven or cluttered ground
- Attack over a front rank of shield-bearers
    - +10 with clear line; –10 if formation is scrambling
- Pull shields, weapons, or cultist acolytes off balance
    - +10 with leverage and position; –10 against braced, armored targets

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Shields (Might) — [Combat, Defense]

Shields is turning a slab of wood and iron into survival: blocking, angling, forming walls, and using your shield as both barrier and blunt instrument—on foot or from saddle.

- Block melee attacks from one or two directions
    - +10 in Full Defense stance; –10 if flanked or surprised
- Deflect or soak arrows, bolts, or thrown weapons

    - +10 with partial cover; –20 vs close-range volleys
- Shield bash to push, stagger, or create openings
    - +10 while charging; –10 against braced enemies
- Protect a Companion, civilian, or wounded ally beside you
    - +20 if you dedicate your action; –10 if split between tasks
- Anchor a shield wall in a narrow passage
    - +20 with disciplined allies; –20 trying alone against many foes

---

Siege & Demolition (Intellect) — [Combat, Tech, Specialist]

Siege & Demolition is the study of **breaking and holding structures**: walls, towers, gates, and engines. It is also the art of tearing down Choir altars and growths without killing everyone nearby.

- Identify weak points in walls, towers, or bastions
    - +10 with time to inspect; –10 under enemy missile fire
- Direct rams, ladders, and engines for best effect
    - +10 with trained crew; –20 with terrified levies
- Place burning materials, alchemical charges, or wedges safely
    - +10 with proper supplies; –20 when improvising with junk
- Sabotage enemy siege engines or fortifications
    - +10 with stealth and time; –20 when rushed under alarm
- Judge risk of collapse or fire spread in structures
    - +10 with good vantage; –10 in thick smoke or night

March & Wilderness

Beast Handling (Presence) — [Social, Survival]

Beast Handling is your ability to calm, guide, and command living animals through posture and voice—even when they smell the grave on you. Most folk are wary of undead knights; animals are terrified. This skill is how you get them to work with you anyway.

- Calm horses, oxen, or dogs that sense undeath
    - +10 with familiar animals; –20 if they've seen you fight
- Train basic behaviors and battle drills
    - +10 with time and proper tack; –10 if rushed
- Read animal fear or aggression in corrupted regions
    - +10 with known species; –10 with tainted or mutated beasts
- Lead pack animals through war-torn or haunted roads
    - +10 with routine and familiar route; –10 in storms or under attack
- Prevent stampede or bolting in panic
    - +20 with early warning; –20 if panic is already in full swing

---

Endure Hardship (Endurance) — [Survival, Physical]

Endure Hardship is your ability to persist through fatigue, hunger, weather, and punishment. Death removed hunger and sleep needs, but not every hardship vanished: armor still weighs, storms still batter, and Consequences still grind you down.

- March long distances in full plate with minimal rest
    - +10 with steady pace; –20 forced marches or retreats
- Withstand exposure to cold, rain, or choking dust
    - +10 with minimal shelter; –20 in blizzard, sandstorm, or miasma
- Resist collapsing from accumulated Wounds and strain
    - +10 if recently treated; –20 when untreated injuries stack
- Ignore discomfort in prolonged vigils or sieges
    - +10 with clear purpose; –10 in pointless delay or boredom
- Function under lingering disease, poison, or Choir taint
    - –10 with mild affliction; –20 with severe or magical effects

---

Navigation (Awareness) — [Exploration]

Navigation is knowing where you are and how to get where you must: by road, star, river, or rumor, through lands where old maps no longer match terrain gouged by war or blight.

- Follow or reconstruct old roads, pilgrim routes, and trade paths
    - +10 with partial maps; –10 when landmarks are gone
- Navigate by sun, stars, and notable constellations
    - +10 under clear sky; –20 in overcast or ash-choked skies

- Plot safe routes avoiding undead-infested zones or Choir strongholds
    - +10 with recent intelligence; –10 when working from hearsay
- Orient in forests, hills, and ravines without clear landmarks
    - +10 with prior travel; –10 in unfamiliar biome
- Coordinate multi-day marches or retreats without getting lost
    - +10 with good timekeeping; –10 under constant harassment

---

Riding (Awareness) — [Vehicle, Mount]

Riding is controlling a mount in motion—pace, fear, balance, and battle stress. For Rals, this is mainly about **undead war-horses** that do not spook at blood, but can still misjudge terrain or collisions.

- Control mount under missile fire, screams, or explosions
    - +10 with bonded mount; –20 with unfamiliar or half-broken beast
- Navigate rough, broken, or corrupted terrain at speed
    - +10 with scouting/preparation; –10 when riding blind
- Stay mounted while striking, parrying, or charging
    - +10 if focusing on balance; –20 during chaotic multi-way clashes
- Jump obstacles, trenches, or fallen siege debris
    - +10 with clear approach; –10 if obscured or slick
- Calm a mount spooked by magick, Choir manifestations, or collapsing structures
    - +10 if you dismount and soothe it; –20 trying to force it forward in saddle

---

Stealthcraft (Grace) — [Exploration]

Stealthcraft is physical stealth: moving unheard in armor, using shadow and cover, and knowing when to stay utterly still. In a ruined, haunted world, this is how you pass Choir patrols and corpse hordes without adding to them.

- Move silently in streets, ruins, or graveyards
    - +10 on soft or cluttered ground; –20 on stone, gravel, or with loose armor
- Hide in cover while enemies pass nearby
    - +10 with deep shadows/obstacles; –20 under bright torchlight or open terrain
- Infiltrate camps, strongholds, or Choir ritual sites
    - +10 with disguise or distraction; –20 against very alert sentries
- Shadow a target through alleys or corridors
    - +10 in crowds; –20 in empty or echoing spaces
- Escape pursuit by breaking line of sight and staying unseen
    - +10 in complex terrain; –20 in open ground

Tracking (Awareness) — [Exploration, Survival]

Tracking is reading spoor, prints, drag-marks, and disturbed environments. In this setting it often means

following **undead hordes, Choir patrols, or relic-smugglers**.

- Follow tracks across soil, mud, snow, or ash
    - +10 on soft ground; –20 on bare rock or cobblestone
- Distinguish human, animal, and undead movement patterns
    - +10 with experience; –10 in heavily churned battlefields
- Estimate numbers, load, and pace from tracks
    - +10 with fresh sign; –20 with old or weathered traces
- Avoid ambush by reading trail "wrongness"
    - +10 when you can take time; –10 if pressed for speed
- Conceal your own party's passage
    - +10 in supportive terrain; –10 when moving fast or with wagons

---

Wilderness Survival (Awareness) — [Exploration, Survival]

Wilderness Survival is staying functional outside walls: shelter, fire, water, food, and navigation in lands where the trees may whisper in Choir tongues and the rivers carry bones.

- Find or improvise shelter in hills, woods, or ruins
    - +10 with available materials; –20 in featureless or blasted terrain
- Start and maintain fire in difficult conditions
    - +10 with dry tinder; –20 in rain, snow, or high wind
- Locate drinkable water and avoid contaminated sources
    - +10 in familiar terrain; –20 in swamps or blighted zones
- Forage or trap safe food for mortals (you don't eat, but they do)
    - +10 with Herbalism support; –10 in winter or wasteland
- Navigate trackless wilderness without becoming hopelessly lost
    - +10 with crude maps or stars; –20 in dense fog, storm, or magical distortion

---

City & Court

Deception (Presence) — [Social]

Deception is lying with a dead man's calm: disguises, forged stories, half-truths, and the ability to look a frightened priest in the eye and convince him that you are not what you clearly are. In a world that fears the Order, Deception often means **passing as something less monstrous**—at least long enough to get inside.

- Lie convincingly about your nature, orders, or loyalties
    - +10 with documents/props; –20 if your reputation precedes you
- Maintain a false identity (mercenary, pilgrim, noble guard)
    - +10 with consistent behavior; –20 if questioned in detail
- Misdirect pursuit or suspicion toward other targets
    - +10 with a prepared scapegoat; –10 under close scrutiny
- Bluff in combat (feints, false retreats)
    - +10 vs undisciplined foes; –20 vs seasoned commanders
- Conceal true motives in negotiations
    - +10 using partial truths; –20 vs skilled inquisitors

Etiquette (Presence) — [Social]

Etiquette is the brittle art of moving through courts, monasteries, guild halls, and noble councils without sparking immediate outrage. For a Ral, it often means **minimizing the shock** of your presence: knowing when to bow, when to speak, and when to keep the helm closed.

- Behave correctly in noble courts and councils
    - +10 with time to prepare; –20 if you barge in on crisis talks
- Interpret status cues, veiled insults, and alliances
    - +10 while observing; –10 under pressure to act quickly
- Deliver petitions, ultimatums, or offers with proper forms
    - +10 with gifts or proof; –10 when unwelcome
- Avoid social missteps in temples and holy houses
    - +10 with knowledge of the faith; –10 if your undeath is exposed
- Secure audiences with local lords or clergy
    - +10 with strong backing or seal; –20 as foreign unknown Ral

---

Insight (Awareness) — [Social]

Insight is reading people: fear in a soldier's eyes, zealotry in a priest's voice, lies in a Choir agent's smile. You are undead; your own emotions are muted or strange, but that distance lets you see living reactions with a cold, clear eye.

- Sense if someone is hiding fear, guilt, or urgent truth
    - +10 in calm conversation; –10 under chaos or crowd noise
- Judge whether a leader will hold or break in battle
    - +10 after observation; –20 on very limited interaction

- Detect lies or half-truths in negotiations
    - +10 when you know some facts; –10 when relying purely on tone
- Read the mood of a mob or congregation
    - +10 from vantage point; –10 when you are the focus of their fear
- Sense if a Choir cultist is fanatical or wavering
    - +10 with time; –10 if they are trained to mask emotions

---

Intimidation (Presence) — [Social]

Intimidation is coercion through fear: the weight of your armor, your undead gaze, your reputation as a death-knight. It can end fights before they start—or turn tense standoffs into massacres if mishandled.

- Force immediate compliance from individuals or small groups
    - +10 with clear leverage (weapons, authority); –20 vs fanatics or Choir zealots
- Break the morale of bandits, cultists, or militia
    - +10 when they're already losing; –10 when they have the upper hand
- Extract information quickly under threat
    - +10 if you control the setting; –20 if they believe death is preferable
- Hold a crowd at bay with presence and gesture
    - +10 with visible support; –20 when heavily outnumbered and unsupported
- Deter betrayal or desertion in uneasy allies
    - +10 if you know their weaknesses; –10 if they feel cornered

---

Lore: Kingdoms (Intellect) — [Knowledge]

Lore: Kingdoms is knowledge of secular realms: borders, laws, dynasties, trade routes, and grudges. The Order survives by navigating these—sometimes as saviors, sometimes as necessary abominations.

- Recall local laws and edicts relevant to the Order
    - +10 in your native region; –20 in distant kingdoms
- Recognize heraldry, banners, and house colors
    - +10 in good light; –10 if torn, burnt, or archaic
- Understand current and historical alliances, wars, and betrayals
    - +10 with recent updates; –10 when relying on old lore
- Map safe vs hostile territories for undead knights
    - +10 with decent maps; –10 when borders have shifted due to war
- Recall key nobles, clergy, and guild leaders by name and reputation
    - +10 for major figures; –10 for minor or secretive ones

Oratory (Presence) — [Social]

Oratory is structured speech to groups: war-cries on the wall, funeral sermons for the fallen, grim briefings before doomed missions. In a world where hope is thin, your words may be all that stands between order and collapse.

- Rally troops or villagers before or during battle

    - +10 in tight-knit group that respects you; –20 with strangers who fear you
- Deliver funerary or memorial speeches that bind morale instead of breaking it
    - +10 when you knew the fallen; –10 when they died in shame
- Calm crowds on the brink of riot or panic
    - +10 with strong message; –20 if they blame you for their fear
- Inspire cooperation between factions that distrust each other
    - +10 using shared enemy; –10 when grudges are fresh
- Advocate for the Order in councils or public assemblies
    - +10 with good evidence of service; –20 where your deeds are slandered

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Persuasion (Presence) — [Social]

Persuasion is honest influence: negotiation, compromise, and making people see how your path protects them, even if they do not like what you are. It is how you secure supplies, allies, and grudging permission.

- Bargain for resources, transport, or information
    - +10 with clear mutual benefit; –10 if you offer little
- Convince a town to accept a garrison or evacuation
    - +10 when danger is visible; –20 when threat is distant or denied
- De-escalate conflicts between mortals and the Order
    - +10 with Oratory/Insight support; –10 when blood has already spilled
- Recruit volunteers, scouts, or informants
    - +10 when danger is obvious; –10 when the risk seems abstract
- Secure cooperation from reluctant clergy or nobles
    - +10 with leverage or proof; –20 if they fear public opinion more than you

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Streetwise (Awareness) — [Social, Exploration]

Streetwise is survival in towns and cities: knowing which taverns are informant nests, which alleys belong to which gangs, and where the Choir hides its eyes and ears among the living.

- Find fences, black markets, and quiet smugglers
    - +10 if you have time to feel out the neighborhood; –20 as a foreign knight in hostile streets
- Locate safehouses, Order sympathizers, or neutral ground
    - +10 with prior contacts; –10 in recently purged districts
- Read gang signs, turf markers, and coded graffiti
    - +10 in your own region; –10 when Choir signs have overwritten old codes
- Identify scams, traps, and entrapment attempts
    - +10 when you can observe; –20 when rushed or personally targeted
- Spread or quash rumors on the street
    - +10 through tavern talk; –10 in towns under fear or strict curfew

Thievery (Grace) — [Tech, Exploration, Specialist]

Thievery is precise criminal technique: locks, traps, pockets, and the sorts of quiet entries even a Ral occasionally needs when frontal assault would doom everyone.

- Pick locks on doors, chests, or chains
    - +10 with quality tools and time; –20 on complex or Choir-modified devices
- Disable mechanical traps and simple wards
    - +10 after careful inspection; –20 when rushed or mid-combat
- Pickpocket keys or small items
    - +10 in crowded markets; –20 when the target is alert and suspicious
- Perform sleight of hand to conceal or swap objects
    - +10 with distractions; –10 under close scrutiny
- Hide contraband or relics in gear, rooms, or wagons
    - +10 with good hiding places; –20 in searches by experts

Trade & Appraisal (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Social]

Trade & Appraisal is recognizing value: coin, goods, relics, land rights, and favors. For the Order, it's vital for **not being endlessly cheated** when negotiating resupply.

- Appraise weapons, armor, and mounts for fair value
    - +10 with time; –10 in rushed caravan deals
- Judge market prices in a region for food, lodging, and services
    - +10 in familiar markets; –10 in regions under famine or war inflation
- Evaluate offers of land, titles, or tithes from nobles
    - +10 with Lore: Kingdoms support; –10 when paperwork is unclear
- Spot exploitative contracts or hidden clauses
    - +10 with Scribing support; –10 when language is deliberately obscure
- Convert loot or spoils into portable and useful wealth
    - +10 with trustworthy brokers; –20 in places hostile to the Order

Lore & Mind

Corpses & Remains (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Mystic]

Corpses & Remains is practical necro-anatomy and battlefield forensics focused on the dead. It's how you tell **what killed someone, how long ago, and whether the Choir touched their Essence**. It also guides safe handling of remains to prevent unwanted reanimation.

- Determine cause and approximate time of death
    - +10 in controlled conditions; –20 in mass-grave chaos
- Identify signs of Sorcery, Choir rites, or unnatural Quietus on bodies
    - +10 with time and tools; –10 in poor light or under time pressure
- Safely dismember or disable corpses to prevent reanimation
    - +10 with experience; –10 when forced to work quickly mid-battle
- Distinguish plague, poison, and ritual killing
    - +10 with Healing/Herbalism support; –20 in heavily decomposed remains
- Prepare remains for Faith rites, transport, or relic extraction
    - +10 with proper ritual implements; –10 in hostile or tainted terrain

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Investigation (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Exploration]

Investigation is structured inquiry: reconstructing events from bloodstains, scorch marks, tracks, and testimony. It is how you piece together **what the Choir did, how, and where they went**.

- Examine scenes of massacre, ritual, or Quietus for clues
    - +10 with time and light; –20 if disturbed by scavengers/undead
- Cross-check witness accounts against physical evidence
    - +10 with multiple witnesses; –10 when all are biased or afraid
- Identify likely entry/exit routes, hidden compartments, or stashes
    - +10 in familiar architecture; –10 in alien or Choir-grown structures
- Link patterns between multiple incidents (signature sigils, methods)
    - +10 with prior files/records; –10 working from memory alone
- Detect forged or altered documents, seals, or ledgers
    - +10 with Scribing & Administration support; –10 when rushed

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Lore: Arcane (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Mystic]

Lore: Arcane is academic understanding of magick, wards, sigils, enchantments, and the metaphysics of Essence as recorded in pre-Choir grimoires and Chapterhouse treatises. It does **not** cast spells; Faith and Sorcery do that. This is knowing what you are dealing with.

- Identify arcane symbols, circles, and glyphs
    - +10 with reference library; –20 mid-combat or in collapsed ruins
- Recall effects of known rituals or spell traditions

    - +10 in your culture's tradition; –10 with distant or lost schools
- Recognize magical items, relics, or foci as dangerous or benign
    - +10 with full, careful examination; –20 for quick battlefield appraisal
- Distinguish Faith miracles from Sorcery manifestations
    - +10 with time; –10 when magick is heavily masked
- Predict potential arcane hazards in an area (wild zones, cursed ruins)
    - +10 if you know its history; –20 if Choir tampering has altered the rules

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Lore: Choir & Heresies (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Mystic]

This Lore covers the **enemy sect** and its offshoots: their symbols, schisms, rites, recruitment patterns, and how their influence spreads. It is as much political as mystical.

- Recognize Choir insignia, chants, and meeting signs
    - +10 with clear view; –10 if symbols are half-erased or disguised
- Recall known heresies, splinter cults, and rival factions
    - +10 if you studied that region; –10 if far from your Chapterhouse's focus
- Predict likely targets of Choir expansion or sabotage
    - +10 with up-to-date reports; –10 relying on old intelligence
- Interpret sacrificial sites, altars, or Choir-written scripture
    - +10 with intact text; –20 if heavily defaced or encoded
- Identify leaders, prophets, or notorious Choir agents by reputation
    - +10 within your kingdom; –10 in foreign lands

Scholar (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Specialist]

Scholar measures your ability to **read, research, and synthesize** information from tomes, reports, maps, and relic inscriptions. It is your general-purpose "study" skill, distinct from specific Lore fields.

- Locate relevant information in Chapterhouse archives or captured libraries
    - +10 with time and catalog; –20 in chaotic, half-burned collections
- Cross-reference conflicting documents or sources
    - +10 with good notes; –10 when working from memory
- Prepare treatises, reports, or briefing dossiers others can act on
    - +10 with adequate time; –10 on urgent deadlines
- Decipher old or damaged scripts and ciphers (with Lore support)
    - +10 with reference texts; –20 if script is partially lost or Choir-altered
- Assist learning new Faith or Sorcery spells as a support Skill
    - +10 when used to prepare notes; –10 for obscure or fragmentary spells

Stronghold Management (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Command]

Stronghold Management is the logistical mind of a Chapterhouse: rations, guard rotations, stable capacity, repair priorities, and the delicate balance between terror and trust among the garrison.

- Plan and maintain sustainable supply and rationing
    - +10 with accurate ledgers; –20 during siege or blockade
- Organize watches, patrols, and alarm systems
    - +10 with enough personnel; –10 when undermanned or exhausted
- Prioritize repairs to walls, gates, and key facilities
    - +10 with time and resources; –10 when many crises compete
- Manage relations between Rals, mortal staff, and local populations
    - +10 with Oratory/Persuasion support; –10 after scandals or massacres
- Prepare evacuation or scorched-earth plans if a Chapterhouse must fall
    - +10 with clear orders and time; –20 under immediate threat

Warfare & Strategy (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Combat]

Warfare & Strategy is zoomed-out thinking: campaigns, sieges, lines of supply, and when to burn a city rather than hold it. Many Rals used to be commanders; this skill brings that instinct into undeath. Instances that require Tactics can also fall under this skill.

- Plan assaults, defenses, and retreats with realistic odds
    - +10 with accurate intelligence; –20 when key facts are missing
- Analyze enemy deployments for weak points or traps
    - +10 with time and vantage point; –10 during battle chaos
- Anticipate likely moves of Choir forces or rival kingdoms
    - +10 if you know their doctrine; –10 with new leaders or unknown cult cells
- Coordinate multi-unit maneuvers, flanks, and feigned retreats
    - +10 with experienced officers; –10 when leading green troops
- Evaluate whether to hold, abandon, or raze positions
    - +10 with Stronghold/Trade input; –10 under strong emotional pressure

Craft & Care

Alchemy (Intellect) — [Craft, Specialist]

Alchemy is the disciplined craft of tinctures, powders, smoke-bombs, oils, and corrosives brewed in cramped Chapterhouse laboratories and roadside cells. It bridges battlefield necessity and occult curiosity: rot-staving salves, corpse-preserving oils, firepots for siege work, and rare elixirs that let the undead pass briefly among the living.

Use it to produce **stable, repeatable concoctions**; Sorcery still handles the truly impossible.

- Brew restorative tonics and stimulants
    - +10 with proper lab and time; –20 in field with improvised gear
- Prepare firepots, smoke bombs, or pitch mixtures
    - +10 if you control the environment; –20 in rain or cramped tunnels
- Distill preserved reagents from rare plants, beast parts, or undead remains
    - +10 with good notes; –20 first time with unknown source
- Identify liquid or powder by scent/taste/smoke
    - +10 slow, careful testing; –20 hurried battlefield check
- Stabilize volatile Choir-tainted substances
    - –10 even with tools; –20 if rushed or under fire

Crafting: Smithing (Intellect) — [Craft]

Smithing is the art of forging and repairing blades, armor, horseshoes, and siege fittings in a world where metal is always in short supply. For the Order, it also includes **modifying barding and plate to fit undead bodies and bone mounts**.

- Repair or reforge weapons and armor
    - +10 in a Chapterhouse forge; –20 with campfire and stone anvil
- Fit or adjust barding for undead war-horses
    - +10 with time and measurements; –10 on a rushing timeline
- Assess quality of captured Choir-forged gear
    - +10 with calm inspection; –10 if coated in active corruption
- Reinforce weak spots in Chapterhouse defenses (hinges, bars, gates)
    - +10 with good materials; –20 using scavenged scrap
- Detect counterfeit or brittle war gear
    - +10 when you can test stress; –10 in quick visual check only

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Crafting: Wood/Leather (Intellect) — [Craft]

Wood/Leather covers saddles, scabbards, straps, shield facings, carts, simple bows, and improvised fortifications. In the Order, it often means **keeping decaying equipment functional** in regions where rot spreads faster than usual.

- Repair saddles, tack, and straps for undead mounts
    - +10 with proper tools; –10 in the field with scavenged scraps
- Make or fletch arrows, javelins, or bolts
    - +10 with quality wood and feathers; –20 in wet or tainted forests

- Build temporary barricades, palisades, or wagon-forts
    - +10 with labor and materials; –20 if under direct attack
- Patch shields and leather armor after battle
    - +10 with time; –10 in forced march conditions
- Create camouflage or blinds in woods, ruins, or cemeteries
    - +10 with abundant material; –10 in barren open ground

Healing/Medicine/Chirurgery (Intellect) — [Medical]

Healing is battlefield and Chapterhouse medicine: binding wounds, cleaning rot, setting bones, and knowing how living bodies differ from your own undead frame. It includes both **caring for mortal allies** and managing the peculiar maintenance of a Ral's corpse.

- Stabilize bleeding or shock in mortals
    - +10 with proper supplies; –20 under attack or time pressure
- Treat infection, fever, or mundane disease
    - +10 if caught early; –20 in late stages or unsanitary conditions
- Set and splint bones, dislocated joints, or crushed limbs
    - +10 with assistance; –10 without tools or clean space
- Remove arrows, bolts, or embedded shrapnel
    - +10 with tools and time; –20 in the field while being hurried
- Adjust and repair a Ral's own damaged body (stitches, rivets, braces)
    - +10 with experience treating undead; –10 when dealing with new type of damage

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Herbalism (Intellect) — [Medical, Craft]

Herbalism is the lore of roots, leaves, fungi, and resins in a world where soil itself might be tainted. It stretches from simple poultices to sedatives, antidote ingredients, and smoke mixtures used to calm panicked crowds or mask scents.

- Identify safe vs toxic plants in corrupted or wild regions
    - +10 in familiar biome; –20 in deeply blighted Choir zones
- Brew poultices and salves to improve Healing Tests
    - +10 with clean water and tools; –10 improvising with scrap
- Prepare antidote components or restorative teas
    - +10 using known recipes; –20 with rare or unknown poisons
- Make mild sedatives or pain-dulling preparations
    - +10 with scales/measure; –10 estimating by eye
- Preserve herbs and reagents for long campaigns
    - +10 with dry storage; –10 in damp or vermin-infested holds

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Inquisition (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Social, Specialist]

Inquisition combines **case-building, doctrinal examination, and structured interrogation**. It's not mere intimidation—it's the disciplined art of exposing lies, heresies, and Choir cells without collapsing into paranoia or slaughter.

- Assemble evidence into a coherent case against suspected cultists
    - +10 with access to records and witnesses; –20 with heavy tampering or fear
- Conduct formal interrogations that blend pressure with logic
    - +10 using Insight/Intimidation in support; –10 under strict time limits
- Distinguish genuine heresy from rumor, ignorance, or political slander
    - +10 with Lore: Choir & Heresies; –10 when everyone has motive to lie
- Design and manage inquiry panels or trials for accused individuals
    - +10 when given authority; –10 when authority is contested or hostile
- Detect patterns in confessions, sightings, and disappearances
    - +10 with Scholar support and time; –10 in war zones with chaotic records

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Scribing & Administration (Intellect) — [Craft, Knowledge]

Scribing & Administration is the mundane backbone of the Order: copying texts, maintaining ledgers, tracking supplies, and producing legible, trustworthy records between Chapterhouses.

- Keep accurate accounts of tithes, rations, arms, and losses
    - +10 with time and tools; –10 in fast-moving campaigns
- Detect falsified ledgers, altered entries, or forged seals
    - +10 when compared to originals; –20 with only one document
- Copy or summarize important texts without introducing errors
    - +10 with training and practice; –10 in poor light or haste
- Manage correspondence between strongholds, allies, and informants
    - +10 with established systems; –10 in chaotic or improvised networks
- Organize archives to grant Advantage to later Scholar checks
    - +10 with staff; –10 when doing everything alone

Faith & Sorcery

Exorcism & Banishment (Presence) — [Mystic, Social, Specialist]

Exorcism & Banishment is the focused practice of **driving out or pushing back hostile spirits, possessing forces, and lesser Choir influences** through word, will, and rite. It sits at the edge between Faith and disciplined presence; not every priest can do it, and not every Ral should try.

- Confront and drive off minor possessing spirits
    - +10 in consecrated or familiar ground; –20 on Choir altars or cursed loci
- Weaken or disrupt ongoing hauntings and ghostly manifestations
    - +10 with proper rites/preparation; –10 when improvised amid chaos
- Support Faith spellwork that targets spirits or bindings
    - +10 when working in tandem with a skilled Faith caster; –10 solo against complex entities
- Hold your ground in direct confrontation with unseen presences
    - +10 with symbolic tools (relic, holy sign); –20 when already mentally shaken
- Negotiate with bound or semi-sentient spirits without losing leverage
    - +10 if you know their history; –10 when blind to their motives

(Specialist: typically requires prior training under experienced exorcists or Chapterhouse mentors.)

Faith (Presence) — [Mystic, Social]

Faith measures your personal connection to divine or saintly power and your skill at litanies, prayers, and rites. It underpins **casting Faith spells**, conducting blessings, and leading the living in devotions—even though you yourself are no longer alive.

- Lead prayers, processions, and vigils without scandal
    - +10 among those who accept the Order; –20 in communities that fear undead
- Call on saints or gods for **Faith spell workings**
    - Apply Faith as the primary casting Skill; modifiers per spell and sanctity of ground
- Consecrate or deconsecrate ground, shrines, and relic altars
    - +10 with proper elements and time; –20 in hostile or defiled sites
- Recognize heresy vs legitimate local custom
    - +10 with lore support; –10 when Choir propaganda has muddied lines
- Hold your composure under theological attack ("you should not exist")
    - +10 in one-on-one debate; –10 before hostile crowds

Gravecraft (Intellect) — [Craft, Mystic]

Gravecraft is the design and construction of **tombs, ossuaries, warded burial sites, and bone-based defenses**. It is part masonry, part ritual geometry: how to stack stone and bone so that the dead rest—or fail to.

- Design and build secure crypts, ossuaries, and burial vaults

    - +10 with skilled labor and time; –20 under siege or harsh deadlines
- Integrate simple physical and symbolic defenses against tomb robbers and cultists
    - +10 with Siege/Wardcraft support; –10 when short on materials
- Read the "intent" of existing grave structures (restful vs weaponized)
    - +10 in intact sites; –10 in ruins half-claimed by Choir growths
- Create bone or skull arrangements that deter low-grade undead activity
    - +10 with Faith/Exorcism significance; –10 where local customs clash
- Identify points where disturbing remains will have the worst consequences
    - +10 with Lore: Saints & Remains; –10 when records are missing or false

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Litany & Ritecraft (Presence) — [Mystic]

Litany & Ritecraft is the **performance and pacing of extended rituals**, vigils, processions, and mass devotions. Where Faith is the depth of belief and direct petition, Litany & Ritecraft is the craft of **holding a ritual together** so it does not unravel—or invite something worse.

- Lead extended litanies without losing focus or congregation cohesion
    - +10 in quiet, safe spaces; –20 under threat or in ambient dread
- Maintain correct sequence and rhythm in complex rites (blessings, consecrations)
    - +10 with access to scrolls/manuals; –10 when working from memory only
- Support Faith spellcasting that requires choirs, responses, or group participation
    - +10 with a well-drilled group; –10 with fearful or disorganized participants
- Hold vigils or watch-services through the night without ritual drift
    - +10 with Oratory/Insight support; –10 when the congregation is exhausted or panicked
- Adapt standard litanies to crisis conditions without losing core meaning
    - +10 with time to plan; –10 improvising under direct assault or disaster

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Lore: Saints & Relics (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Mystic]

Saints & Relics covers holy figures, their miracles, where their bones lie, and which relics still hold power—or corruption. For Rals, this lore is both weapon and source of shame.

- Identify which relics are genuine, inert, or dangerous
    - +10 with time and Faith/Arcane support; –20 in haste
- Recall which saint's cult dominates a town or region
    - +10 for major centers; –10 for scattered rural devotions
- Understand taboos around handling remains and relics
    - +10 within your tradition; –10 among foreign sects
- Recognize saintly iconography and miracle patterns

    - +10 in intact shrines; –10 in half-smashed Choir-defaced ones
- Predict how clergy and laity will react to Order presence at holy sites
    - +10 with current reports; –10 in places long cut off by war

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Necromantic Anatomy (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Mystic, Specialist]

Necromantic Anatomy is detailed understanding of **undead bodies, Choir constructs, and grafted monstrosities**. It tells you where to strike, what to sever, and which parts to destroy or preserve.

- Identify structural weak points in different types of undead
    - +10 with time to examine; –10 at a glance in combat
- Recommend optimal damage types (cutting, blunt, fire, Faith) vs specific undead
    - +10 if you've seen that type before; –10 when facing unique abominations
- Dissect or dismantle Choir-made constructs safely
    - +10 in controlled setting; –20 in the field with active corruption
- Determine how an undead was animated (Sorcery, Choir rite, wild necrosis)
    - +10 with Lore: Arcane/Choir support; –10 with mixed or experimental methods
- Salvage or neutralize necrotic components for study or disposal
    - +10 with proper containment gear; –10 improvising with cloth and rope

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Relic Handling (Intellect) — [Knowledge, Craft]

Relic Handling is **practical protocol** for touching, moving, storing, and deploying relics, saint-bones, and potent icons. Lore: Saints & Relics tells you what a relic is; Relic Handling keeps it from breaking, corrupting, or being stolen.

- Package and transport relics without physical or spiritual damage
    - +10 with purpose-built reliquaries; –10 with improvised containers
- Arrange reliquaries in altars or shrines for maximum protective or inspirational effect
    - +10 with Faith/Mystic support; –10 when guesses replace doctrine
- Recognize when a relic is becoming unstable, tainted, or counterfeit
    - +10 with time to inspect; –20 during chaotic movement or combat
- Oversee processions that involve relics, minimizing risk of theft or desecration
    - +10 with disciplined escorts; –10 in hostile or crowded streets
- Reduce collateral harm from accidentally activated relics or saint-echoes
    - +10 if you saw it activate before; –10 when it manifests in unknown ways

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Sorcery (Intellect) — [Mystic, Specialist]

Sorcery is **active practice** of forbidden workings: precise diagrams, incantations, and personal Essence manipulation that always courts Corruption. It is distinct from Lore: Arcane (theory) and from Faith (petition).

- Cast Sorcery spells (as defined in the magick chapter)
    - Use Sorcery as the primary casting Skill; apply spell-specific modifiers
- Maintain concentration under duress when channeling dangerous power
    - +10 in protected space; –20 under attack or loud distraction
- Modify or adapt known Sorcery workings to new contexts
    - +10 with extensive preparation; –20 improvising under pressure
- Recognize flaws or sabotage in others' Sorcery diagrams
    - +10 with time; –10 mid-ritual
- Contain minor backlashes or Essence flares when a spell misfires
    - +10 if failure was near-miss; –20 on catastrophic miscast

(Presence will usually be tested separately for **Corruption** checks.)

Wardcraft: Salt & Sigil (Intellect) — [Mystic, Craft, Specialist]

Wardcraft: Salt & Sigil is low-grade protective magick—**lines of salt, carved runes, iron nails, and inscribed circles** that resist spirits, minor undead, and ambient Choir seepage. It is not as powerful or flexible as full Faith or Sorcery, but it is often safer and more repeatable.

- Lay protective salt lines, circles, or thresholds
    - +10 with time and dry materials; –20 in wet, windy, or trampled conditions
- Inscribe simple ward sigils on doors, walls, armor, or saddles
    - +10 with proper tools and reference patterns; –10 hurried or improvised glyphs
- Reinforce existing wards or identify their remaining strength
    - +10 with Lore: Arcane/Choir; –10 when dealing with unfamiliar styles
- Create temporary "safe corners" in haunted sites or battlefields
    - +10 with multiple ward materials; –20 when limited to one weak medium
- Bypass or safely unravel minor hostile wards
    - +10 if you understand their structure; –20 under time pressure or threat

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Weathering the Choir (Presence) — [Resolve, Mystic]

Weathering the Choir is specialized psychological and spiritual resilience against **whispers, visions, temptations, and presence** from the Choir and its demon-god. It is beyond ordinary Resolve: this is familiarity with the *specific* ways the enemy tries to get inside your mind.

- Resist Choir-induced hallucinations, whispers, and despair surges
    - +10 with prior experience; –20 during first intense exposure
- Keep your voice and posture steady when confronted with monstrous revelations
    - +10 in presence of comrades; –10 when isolated or singled out
- Sit through Choir sermons, propaganda, or interrogations without breaking

    - +10 when prepared and briefed; –20 when captured off-guard
- Maintain coherent commands and decisions under psychic pressure
    - +10 with Warfare & Strategy support; –10 when many lives hinge on every choice
- Recover from minor psychic shocks faster during downtime
    - +10 in supportive, warded environments; –10 in hostile, haunted ones

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Chapter 6: Faith, Sorcery, and the Quiet Fire

The Order of Ral stands between two failing lights.

On one side are the **saints and gods of the old world**, whose churches are shuttered, whose relics are scattered, and whose miracles come rarely and at great cost. Their power is not gone, but it is thin—pulled taut over too many wounds.

On the other side is the **Grave Star, Athrakar**, unblinking over fields of bone. Its power is immediate, eager, and corrupting. The Choir of the Grave Star feeds on despair, promising an end to fear through universal stillness and Quietus.

Every Ral walks between these forces with **Essence** burning cold in their chest. Some cling to Faith, coaxing light from failing altars. Others reach—cautiously or greedily—for Sorcery, knowing that every spell tightens the Grave Star's grip.

This chapter explains how **magick works in the Order of Ral**, both in-setting and at the table, using the **One-on-One RPG System**: 1d100 resolution, Skills, Destiny, Advantage/Disadvantage, and DoS/DoF.

Theology of a Dying Age

Before the first dead walked out of their graves, the world's religion was **messy and local**. City temples squabbled with rural shrines. Saints had overlapping domains. Priests disagreed about doctrine and still shared wine afterward.

Miracles existed, but they were rare and never guaranteed.

When the dead stopped resting, the old structures fractured. Some temples doubled down—declaring more fasts, more penance, more pilgrimages. Some made quiet bargains with the Choir. Others simply went silent, their gods' voices lost beneath the Grave Star's constant pressure.

Rals were born from this crisis.

- To the faithful, *the Order of Ral* are **blasphemous protectors**: undead knights who still invoke holy names.
- To the Choir, they are **stolen property**—souls that should belong to Athrakar.
- To Rals themselves, Faith and Sorcery are not abstractions. They are tools that leave marks.

The Protagonist's choices about **what magick to study, which spells to cast, and how much to risk** shape not just the campaign's outcomes, but the Ral's soul.

Sources of Power: Essence, Faith, and Sorcery

All supernatural workings in this module draw from **Essence**, represented mechanically and narratively.

Essence (Recap)

- **Essence Max** = ⌈**Presence (PRE)** ÷ 2⌉ (round up).
- Spending Essence fuels **Faith spells, Sorcery, certain Boons, and major rituals**.
- Essence recovers over time through **rest, meditation, and ritual**, as described in the Downtime chapter (short rest, full rest, special sites).

When a Ral channels power, it is Essence that flickers and drains—even if the **source** is a saint or the Grave Star itself.

Faith

Faith is power mediated through:

- Saints, gods, and holy orders.
- Relics, liturgy, and long-standing oaths.

It is **not** safe, exactly. Faith spells can fail, backlash, or strain the caster's Essence. But Faith **does not inherently cause Corruption**. Instead, misused Faith risks:

- Social and spiritual consequences (loss of standing, doubt).
- Narrative complications (omens, silence from on high).

Sorcery

Sorcery is direct, hungry, and transactional. It pulls on:

- The **Grave Star's radiance** and related entities.
- Old, forbidden currents of the world's under-creation.

Every Sorcery spell:

- Costs Essence.
- Requires a **Presence (PRE) check** after casting to cage the power.
- On a failed **PRE** check, inflicts **Corruption** (1 for lesser workings, up to 4 for high rites).

Sorcery gives you reliable leverage in impossible situations—and continuously drags you toward **Hollowing** and possible **Quietus**.

Casting Magick: One-On-One Resolution

Casting in Order of Ral uses the normal One-on-One structure:

1. **Describe Intent**
2. **Choose the Spell**
3. **Pay Essence**
4. **Roll to Cast** (Skill-based)
5. **Interpret DoS/DoF**
6. **Resolve Secondary Checks** (Presence for Sorcery, etc.)

Step 1: Describe Intent

The Protagonist must state:

- What spell they are using.
- What they hope to achieve.

The Director can clarify edge cases, apply situational modifiers, and determine if the spell is even appropriate. "Can I calm this riot?" with a small blessing might yield:

- "You can calm a few key figures, not an entire mob," or
- "You can give Advantage to your Command checks by blessing your words."

Step 2: Choose the Spell

Each spell in this chapter provides:

- **Range/Area**
- **Duration**
- **Power** (Essence cost)
- **Description**
- **Modifiers** (contextual bonuses/penalties)

Faith spells usually call for a **Theology** or related Skill Test. Sorcery spells usually call for an **Occult/Grave Lore** or related Skill Test.

Step 3: Pay Essence

Before rolling to cast:

- Subtract the spell's **Power** from your current Essence.
- If you do not have enough Essence, you may not cast the spell unless the Director allows an extreme option (burning Vitality, permanent Attribute loss, etc.); such options should be rare and tied to Destiny and consequences.

Step 4: Roll to Cast (Skill Test)

Roll **1d100** against:

- **Faith Spell:** Theology (or relevant Faith Skill)
- **Sorcery Spell:** Occult/Grave Lore (or relevant Sorcery Skill)

Apply:

- **Advantage/Disadvantage** as listed in the spell's Modifiers line and situational factors.
- Flat modifiers like **+10 / –20** as appropriate.

Use your standard **DoS/DoF** interpretation from One-on-One:

- The margin by which you succeed or fail influences the strength, precision, or side effects of the spell.
- The Director can use large DoF to introduce complications: partial misfires, unintended targets, weak effects.

Step 5: Interpret DoS/DoF

Examples:

- **High DoS (very good success):** Larger radius, longer duration, improved potency, or additional narrative benefit.
- **Barely Success:** Spell functions as written, but with small flaws: shorter duration, visible strain, or subtle side effects.
- **Barely Fail:** Lesser Win possibility—minor, uncontrolled effect, some Essence wasted, or a dramatic near-miss.
- **Major Fail:** Essence is consumed; the spell fizzles or misfires. The Director may apply narrative consequences, especially with Sorcery.

Step 6: Sorcery Presence Check & Corruption

For **Sorcery only**:

After a **successful** casting, the Ral must contain the Grave Star's residue.

- Roll a **Presence (PRE) Test** with a penalty assigned to the spell (–10, –20, or –30).
- On **success:** No Corruption from this casting.
- On **failure:** Gain **Corruption** as specified (1–4 points, depending on spell potency).

The Presence Check represents instinct, will, and spiritual discipline. High-essence, high-Corruption Rals can become terrifying casters—but each Sorcery use risks pushing them toward 10 Corruption and the edge of the Abyss.

Learning Spells: Study, Scholarship, and Teachers

No one "just knows" magick in this module. Every spell must be learned individually.

Study Time

Each spell lists a **Study Time** in game-days. During that time the Protagonist must:

- Have access to the spell's **source** (tome, scroll, grimoire, or instructor).
- Dedicate a significant portion of downtime to study, prayer, or practice.

You can partition the Study Time across multiple days as long as the Protagonist isn't constantly interrupted by crises.

Learning Test

At the end of Study Time, the Protagonist attempts to learn the spell by making:

> A **Scholar Skill Test** (if they have it) or an **INT Test at –10**.

- **Success:** Spell learned and added to the character's repertoire.
- **Failure:** Time is spent but the spell is not learned; they may study again later.

Teachers and Instructors

Having a teacher alters both **Study Time and Test modifiers**.

Each spell's Study Time assumes **self-study** from texts or observation.

If a teacher is available:

- **Lesser Instructor:**
    - Reduce Study Time by **10%** (round up to the next full day).
    - Learning Test becomes **INT +10** instead of INT –10 if Scholar is unavailable (or **Scholar +10**).
- **Master Instructor:**
    - Reduce Study Time by **20%** (round up).
    - Learning Test becomes **INT +20** (or **Scholar +20**).

The Director decides whether a given teacher is lesser or master, based on narrative position and experience.

Faith Magick In Play

Faith magick should feel:

- **Hard-won and solemn.** It is not casual spell-flinging.
- **Bound to behavior.** Certain spells may refuse to function if the Ral violates core tenets (merciless slaughter, cynical mockery of saints, etc.).
- **Varied in scale.** Some prayers are small hearth blessings; others are battlefield miracles.

Failures in Faith are often **quiet**: a prayer that yields no sign, a ward that doesn't hold as strongly as hoped. The real sting is often narrative—loss of confidence, witnesses doubting, the Ral questioning whether they've been abandoned.

Sorcery in Play

Sorcery should feel:

- **Efficient, powerful, and dangerous**.
- **Morally loaded**: each use is a choice to lean on Athrakar's gravity.
- **Unclean.** Even when it helps, it leaves a mark—smells, sensations, unnatural shadows.

Failures in Sorcery should be **visible**:

- Black frost on stone.
- Whispers without speakers.
- Brief flares of star-cold light.

The Presence Check is your main mechanical lever to show the cost. As Corruption climbs, some Sorcery spells may become easier mechanically—while socially and spiritually destroying the Ral.

Cantrips (Minor Workings)

Cantrips are **low-Essence "comfort" spells**: little blessings, minor conveniences, and cosmetic workings that do not change the course of battles—unless used cleverly.

Unless noted, Cantrips:

- Have **low Power** (Essence 0–1).
- Rarely involve Corruption.
- Can usually be learned in **short Study Times**.
- Once learned, no skill roll is required to successfully cast a cantrip (fiction constraints may apply if deemed appropriate by the Director)

CANTRIPS

Hearth-Breath Ember

Range/Area: Touch (a hearth, candle, coal, or firepit)
Duration: Immediate; fire becomes stable for an hour of normal use
Power: 1
Study Time: 2 days of devotional practice
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with an instructor of the hearth-lore, INT +10 (–10% Study Time) or INT +20 (–20% Study Time)
Description: You breathe softly into cupped hands over ash or wick; the heat answers like an old friend. A dull ember awakens, smoke settles into a clean spiral, and the fire burns steady rather than hungry. This does not create fire from nothing; it coaxes heat from almost-dead coals or damp wicks.
Modifiers: +10 with proper hearth tools/ash bowl; –20 in rain or strong wind; Disadvantage if iron is embedded in the hearth hardware.

Pilgrim's Glow

Range/Area: Self; a soft nimbus in 2-meter radius
Duration: 1 hour
Power: 1
Study Time: 3 days of travel-prayer and practice at dusk
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a temple instructor, INT +10/+20 and Study Time reduced 10/20%
Description: A faint, warm light clings to your armor and cloak, enough to see the road and faces nearby without spoiling night vision. The glow feels like lamplight from a remembered inn and comforts weary travelers. It does not blind or dazzle and fades if you fall unconscious.
Modifiers: +10 when cast at twilight or in established camps; –10 in heavy fog or rain; Advantage on social Tests to soothe frightened commoners while it is active.

Saint's Whisper

Range/Area: 10 meters, line of sight
Duration: 1 brief exchange of words
Power: 0
Study Time: 4 days of silent contemplation
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a confessor teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You speak a short phrase without moving your lips; a chosen target hears it as a faint whisper in their ear, colored by your normal voice. This is not telepathy; you must see the target and they must understand your language.
Modifiers: +10 in churches, chapels, or near relics; –10

in areas heavily tainted by the Choir; Disadvantage if you attempt to whisper to multiple people at once (only one will hear clearly).

Grave-Candle

Range/Area: Touch (a candle, lantern, or similar)
Duration: 4 hours or until extinguished
Power: 1
Study Time: 3 days meditating in burial grounds
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a grave-warden instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You trace a quiet sigil over a wick and light it. The flame burns with a steady, pale hue that **repels vermin and wild scavengers** but does not frighten undead. The light feels colder than normal, like moonlight on stone, but does not harm the living.
Modifiers: +10 when used in graveyards, catacombs, or ossuaries; –10 in strong wind; Advantage on Awareness Tests to notice movement at the edge of its light.

Binding Knot

Range/Area: Touch (a rope, strap, or chain)
Duration: Until knot is deliberately untied or rope is destroyed
Power: 0
Study Time: 2 days of practice with cords and bindings
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a squire or sailor as instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You tie a simple knot and whisper a short formula; the knot tightens with subtle, unyielding will. It becomes extremely difficult to loosen accidentally: tack sits firm, packs do not spill, and prisoners do not slip free easily. It is still vulnerable to cutting.
Modifiers: +10 when you have time and proper tools; –10 when working hurriedly or in darkness; Advantage on Tests to resist knots slipping under strain.

Ember-Scent

Range/Area: Self; 5-meter awareness radius
Duration: 10 minutes
Power: 0
Study Time: 3 days burning incense and studying smoke
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a temple incense-keeper teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: By inhaling and exhaling slowly, you attune your senses to the faint acrid tang of unnatural burning: grave-ash, corpse-fires, residue of certain Sorcery. For a short time, you gain a subtle awareness of such scents within a few meters, even if masked.
Modifiers: +10 in still air; –20 in strong wind or heavy rain; Advantage on Awareness Tests to detect recent burning related to undead or dark rituals.

Pilgrim's Measure

Range/Area: Self
Duration: Instant
Power: 0
Study Time: 2 days of road-walking and mental counting
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a road-templar instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You close your eyes and pace a short distance, synchronizing breath and step; you gain an instinctive sense of **how far you can travel in a day** on current terrain with your current group, assuming no major interruptions. This is a rough estimate, not navigation.
Modifiers: +10 on familiar routes; –10 in trackless wilderness; Disadvantage if overburdened or wounded when you cast it.

Quiet Cup

Range/Area: Touch (a single drink)
Duration: 1 scene or until the cup is finished
Power: 0

Study Time: 2 days in hospices or taverns, watching people drink
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Hospitaller teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You hold a cup, murmur a short comfort blessing, and pass it to a frightened or agitated person. As they drink, their hands steady; they do not become fearless, but their panic weakens, and they can listen, speak, or sleep more easily.
Modifiers: +10 when used with warm, non-spoiled drink in a calm setting; –20 in the midst of active combat or chaos; Advantage on social Tests to persuade or calm the drinker afterward.

Lantern of Letters

Range/Area: Within the light of a single lantern or candle
Duration: 1 hour
Power: 1
Study Time: 4 days studying texts by lamplight
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a scribe as instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You bless a reading light so that written words within its glow seem clearer. Faded ink darkens, cramped script becomes easier to parse, and minor smudges resolve. This does not decode ciphers or translate languages, but aids legibility.
Modifiers: +10 with proper reading tools; –10 on badly damaged parchment; Advantage on Scholar or Investigation Tests to decipher difficult handwriting while active.

Road-Dust Blessing

Range/Area: Group within 5 meters
Duration: Until next rest or 1 day, whichever comes first
Power: 1
Study Time: 4 days walking roads and performing short rituals at milestones
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Grave-Road Templar as instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You draw a circle of dust or earth and invite your companions to step through in turn. Their boots seem to find surer purchase; minor stones and thorns shift aside. The blessing eases chafing and footsore fatigue, but does not speed travel.
Modifiers: +10 on maintained roads or known trails; –10 in swamps or deep snow; Advantage on Endure Hardship Tests related to marching while active.

FAITH SPELLS

These spells are **full workings of Faith**, costing more Essence and having stronger effects.

- **Faith** spells require the Faith skill to use.

Ward Against the Unquiet

Range/Area: 5-meter radius centered on a fixed point
Duration: 1 hour
Power: 3
Study Time: 10 days of shrine-warding practice
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a veteran priest or warding knight instructing, INT +10/+20 and Study Time –10/20%
Description: You mark a circle with chalk, salt, or holy oil and recite a warding litany. Within its radius, **lesser undead** (shamblers, basic skeletons) must pass a Hard Willpower or Commanding Spirit Test to cross the boundary. Those that do enter fight at Disadvantage. Greater undead feel resistance and may push through with difficulty.
Modifiers: +10 if cast on consecrated ground or at an existing shrine; –20 in areas of strong Choir corruption; Advantage on the Theology Test if you incorporate relics into the ward.

Blessing of the Shield-Hand

Range/Area: Touch; one ally or self
Duration: 1 scene or combat
Power: 2
Study Time: 7 days of martial prayer and shield drills
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a paladin or temple knight instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You touch a shield or bracer and murmur a defensive prayer. For the duration, the blessed target gains **+10% to Block/Parry Tests** and Advantage on Tests to resist being disarmed or knocked prone. The blessing manifests as faint sigils on metal or leather when struck.
Modifiers: +10 if invoked before battle in calm conditions; –10 if cast hurriedly under direct attack; Disadvantage if the recipient has recently committed a cowardly or dishonorable act.

Pilgrim's Sanctuary

Range/Area: A single room, tent, or campsite
Duration: 1 night's rest
Power: 3
Study Time: 12 days spent in hospices and roadside chapels
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Hospitaller or road-priest instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You bless a resting place with quietly spoken verses, marking doorways and improvised boundaries. Those who sleep within gain **+20% to Essence recovery rolls** (or recover an additional fixed amount of Essence, per Director's preference) and Advantage on Tests to resist nightmares or supernatural fear that night.
Modifiers: +10 when cast at the end of a shared meal; –10 in open, exposed ground; Disadvantage if cast in a place where a betrayal or murder has occurred recently.

Banner of Resolve

Range/Area: A visible banner, relic standard, or holy symbol
Duration: 1 combat or major confrontation
Power: 4
Study Time: 14 days of ceremony training and battle prayer
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a battlefield chaplain or standard-bearer instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You bless a banner or standard, calling upon saints of courage. All allied **mortal troops** who can see it gain **+10% to Morale/Resolve Tests and +10% to Attack** in the first round of combat. If the bearer falls, all those allies must test Morale at –20%.
Modifiers: +10 when invoked before assembled troops; –20 if cast in a rout or panic; Advantage on Theology Test if the banner bears genuine relic fragments.

Sun-Tongue Rebuke

Range/Area: 10 meters; one target undead
Duration: Instant
Power: 2
Study Time: 8 days of chanting and exorcism practice
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with an exorcist or Witch-Hunter instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You speak a short line of burning scripture directly at an undead creature. On a successful Theology Test, the target suffers a **shock of spiritual pain**: it must pass a Hard Willpower Test or be forced to retreat 3 meters and suffer Disadvantage on its next attack. Lesser undead may be destroyed outright on a high DoS.
Modifiers: +10 when brandishing a holy symbol; –10 against undead created directly by Sorcery; Disadvantage if your Corruption is 60 or higher.

Hands of the Hospitaller

Range/Area: Touch; one living or undead ally
Duration: Instant
Power: 3
Study Time: 12 days in infirmaries and battlefields
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a master healer teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: Your gauntlets glow faintly as you place your hands on a wounded ally. On a successful Medicine/Chirurgery or Theology Test (whichever is higher), you may **reduce a Wound's severity by one step** or restore a significant amount of Vitality, as per Director's scale. This does not regrow lost limbs or undo Quietus, but can stave off death.
Modifiers: +10 when used immediately after a wound is taken; –10 on old, untreated injuries; Advantage if the target is a fellow Ral and you recite shared oaths.

Calm the Trembling Heart

Range/Area: 5-meter radius group
Duration: 10 minutes
Power: 2
Study Time: 6 days working among traumatized refugees or soldiers
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a confessor or counselor instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You speak a measured prayer and invite those around you to breathe with you. Those in the radius who are frightened, panicked, or stunned by fear may retest their Resolve at Advantage. For the duration, they gain **+10% to Morale Tests** against psychological effects.
Modifiers: +10 in quiet, enclosed spaces; –10 in the midst of explosions, screams, or visible horror; Disadvantage if you have just committed an act of overt cruelty in front of them.

Relic-Aura Insight

Range/Area: Touch; a relic, icon, or sacred object
Duration: 1 minute
Power: 1
Study Time: 5 days examining relics and icons
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a temple archivist instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You place your hand on a purported relic and close your eyes. On a Theology or Occult Test, you sense whether the item bears **genuine sacred resonance** (true relic), **residual faith** (well-loved symbol), or **tainted aura** (corrupted or false). The spell does not reveal precise origin but gives a clear impression.
Modifiers: +10 in temple or reliquary; –20 in strong Choir corruption; Disadvantage if your Corruption is 80 or higher.

Sanctify the Threshold

Range/Area: One doorway, gate, or arch
Duration: 1 day
Power: 3
Study Time: 9 days of ritual practice at doorways and gates
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a castle chaplain or ward-mage instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: By inscribing small sigils along a doorway and praying, you mark a boundary as **hostile to undeath**. Undead attempting to pass through must pass a Hard Willpower Test or treat it as a barrier for the duration. Living beings feel a faint pressure but may pass freely.
Modifiers: +10 if you incorporate holy water or blessed oil; –10 on damaged or crumbling thresholds; Advantage on Theology Test if you know the history of the building.

Flames of the Just Watch

Range/Area: A single visible fire (torch, brazier, etc.)
Duration: 1 scene or 1 night watch
Power: 2
Study Time: 7 days guarding fires at night
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a veteran sentry or priest of watchfulness instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You gesture over a watch-fire and call on saints of vigilance. For the duration, the fire **flashes or flares** subtly whenever hostile creatures (including undead) come within a set distance, even if unseen. The flame does not indicate exact direction, only that danger is near.
Modifiers: +10 in clear weather; –10 in heavy rain; Advantage on Awareness Tests to locate the threat once the flame reacts.

Circle of Shared Burden

Range/Area: Up to 5 willing allies within 5 meters
Duration: 1 scene
Power: 4
Study Time: 15 days of group ritual practice
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a seasoned chaplain, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You bind a small group into a quiet fellowship of endurance. For the duration, they may **split the effects of fear and fatigue**: when one suffers a fear effect, they may distribute penalties among the circle; similarly, long marches wear them down more evenly. This does not negate effects, but smooths extremes.
Modifiers: +10 when cast in a safe setting before a known ordeal; –10 if cast mid-crisis; Disadvantage if members of the circle harbor secret hostility to each other.

Mercy's Veil

Range/Area: Self or one ally
Duration: 1 hour
Power: 2
Study Time: 8 days serving among plague victims and the dying
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a compassionate priest or Hospitaller, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You soften your presence, asking for a saint's gentleness. The target seems **less threatening**; their undead features blur under a pall of exhaustion or illness, making them easier to pass as "merely sick" or "war-worn" among the living. Observers suffer Disadvantage on immediate "are they undead?" gut reactions.
Modifiers: +10 in dim light or crowded settings; –10 in bright sunlight or under scrutiny; Disadvantage if you openly commit violence while the veil is active.

Grave-Road Ward

Range/Area: A stretch of road up to 50 meters
Duration: 1 day
Power: 3
Study Time: 10 days walking pilgrimage roads in ritual
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Grave-Road Templar as instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You walk a portion of road, scattering dust or salt and reciting specific verses. For one day, **natural animals** are less likely to panic or stampede there, and travelers gain **+10% to Awareness to spot roadside ambushes**. Undead may still attack, but find it slightly harder to surprise travelers (Disadvantage on Stealth Tests).
Modifiers: +10 on long-used roads; –10 on newly-cut paths; Disadvantage if the road has recently seen deliberate atrocity.

Communion of Embers

Range/Area: Up to 4 participants sharing one hearth
Duration: 1 night's rest
Power: 3
Study Time: 9 days practicing shared vigils
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a contemplative prior or hermit instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: As companions sit around a fire, you lead them in a soft, synchronized chant. Their dreams that night align in theme: they may share insights, omens, or emotional clarity. Mechanically, they gain **Advantage on one Insight or Resolve Test** the following day related to what was discussed or dreamt.
Modifiers: +10 if all participants speak honestly before sleeping; –10 if there is hidden malice; Disadvantage if the fire is in a place of strong Choir influence.

Sinner's Mirror

Range/Area: Touch; a reflective surface (water, mirror, polished metal)
Duration: 1 minute
Power: 2
Study Time: 7 days of confessional listening and penitential rites
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a confessor or inquisitor instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You stare into a reflective surface and invite another to look beside you. On a successful Theology or Insight Test, the reflection briefly reveals a **symbolic image of the viewer's most recent serious sin**—blood on hands, broken chains, a turned back, etc. Only you see this clearly; the other may sense unease.
Modifiers: +10 when used in a consecrated confessional space; –20 in zones of strong Choir influence; Disadvantage if your own Corruption exceeds 60.

Saint's Footstep

Range/Area: Self
Duration: 10 minutes
Power: 2
Study Time: 6 days of walking in silent prayer
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a pilgrim-guide instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You concentrate on a saint known for patience and endurance. Your footsteps become strangely quiet and even; for the duration, you gain **+10% to Stealth** and **Advantage on Endure Hardship** related to walking, climbing, or marching. This is not invisibility, but a smoothing of your presence.
Modifiers: +10 when moving at a measured pace; –10 when sprinting; Disadvantage in heavy armor if already overburdened.

Aegis of Names

Range/Area: Self or one ally
Duration: 1 combat or scene
Power: 4
Study Time: 14 days practicing name-recitation of saints and martyrs
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a theologian or chanter instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You chant a roll of holy names, weaving them around a chosen person like a shield. For the duration, the target gains **+10% to Resists against mind-affecting powers, fear, and compulsion**, and once during the duration they may automatically convert a failed such Test into a Lesser Win instead of total failure.
Modifiers: +10 when invoked in a place where saints are honored; –10 when surrounded by overt blasphemy or Choir rituals; Disadvantage if the target is actively using Sorcery during the effect.

Benediction of the Quiet Blade

Range/Area: Touch; one melee weapon
Duration: 1 combat
Power: 3
Study Time: 9 days of blade-oiling and prayer
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a relic-smith or martial chaplain teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You anoint a weapon and whisper a prayer that it strike swiftly and cleanly. Against undead and Choir agents, it gains **+10% to hit** and deals **one step higher damage** on Critical hits. Against innocents or clearly non-hostile targets, the weapon feels heavy and reluctant, imposing Disadvantage if the wielder attacks them.
Modifiers: +10 when the wielder has declared a righteous cause; –20 if used for personal vengeance or cruelty; Disadvantage on cast if your Corruption is 70+.

Circle of Tarrying Shadows

Range/Area: 5-meter radius
Duration: 15 minutes
Power: 3
Study Time: 10 days of twilight vigil
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a contemplative shadow-chapel instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You call the twilight to linger. Within the circle, shadows remain deeper than they should; allies gain **+10% to Stealth**, while hostile ranged attacks from outside the circle suffer **–10% to hit** as if through light haze. Undead are not harmed but may find visibility slightly obscured.
Modifiers: +10 at dusk or dawn; –10 under direct noon sun; Disadvantage in heavy magical illumination or star-bright Choir zones.

Grave-Rider's Blessing

Range/Area: Touch; your undead warhorse
Duration: 1 day
Power: 3
Study Time: 8 days spent in stable-rituals and mount prayers
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a seasoned Ral or stable-chaplain instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You trace a sigil where neck meets shoulder on your mount. For a day, your horse gains **+10% to Athletics and Morale/Discipline**, and any attempts to magically frighten or turn it are made at Disadvantage. In addition, you gain Advantage on the first Ride Test of the day that would prevent a fall or dismount.
Modifiers: +10 when the mount has been fed, groomed, and honored; –10 if the mount was mistreated; Disadvantage if you are at Corruption 80–100.

SORCERY SPELLS

All Sorcery spells share the following additional elements:

- **Presence Check:** After a successful cast, roll PRE at the listed penalty.
- **Failure:** Gain the listed **Corruption**.
- **Require** the **Sorcery** skill for use.

Sorcery always **pushes** the Ral toward Hollowing.

Grave Star Flare

Range/Area: 10-meter line or 5-meter cone
Duration: Instant
Power: 3
Study Time: 12 days studying star sigils and corpse-lights
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Choir defector or

dark tutor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You trace a jagged sign in the air; a burst of pale, corpse-colored light tears through the chosen area. Living creatures must pass a Hard Endurance Test or suffer **radiant-cold burns** (moderate damage and temporary blindness); undead instead gain a momentary surge of frenzy (Advantage on next attack but –10% Defense) as the Grave Star's attention brushes them.
Modifiers: +10 at night under visible stars; –20 in bright daylight; Disadvantage if cast on consecrated ground.
Presence Check: PRE –10; Failure: 1 Corruption.

Bone-Grasping Earth

Range/Area: 5-meter radius patch of ground
Duration: 1 round per DoS (or Director's similar scaling)
Power: 4
Study Time: 16 days of graveyard immersion and soil rites
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with an experienced necromancer teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You whisper to the bones below. In the affected area, skeletal hands and rotted arms claw up, grabbing at legs. All creatures within must pass an Agility or Athletics Test or be **entangled**, suffering –20% to attacks and movement. Those who fall may be dragged prone. After the duration, the ground settles, leaving disturbed soil and scattered bones.
Modifiers: +10 in graveyards or mass grave sites; –20 on stone floors or man-made paving; Disadvantage if the area was recently blessed or sanctified.
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Plague-Breath

Range/Area: 3-meter cone from caster's mouth
Duration: Instant; lingering miasma 1 round
Power: 4
Study Time: 14 days among plague pits and rotting carrion
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Choir plague-chanter or similar, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You exhale a cloud of invisible corruption. Living creatures in the cone must pass a Hard Endurance Test or contract a **spiritual sickness**: –10% to physical actions (Athletics, attack, Endure Hardship) for several days unless treated. Undead are unaffected. The spell is silent and leaves little physical trace.
Modifiers: +10 in stagnant air or enclosed spaces; –20 outdoors in strong wind; Disadvantage if you are currently under an active Faith-based ward.
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Soul-Hook Thread

Range/Area: One visible target within 20 meters
Duration: Concentration; up to a few minutes
Power: 5
Study Time: 20 days of forbidden psychic diagrams and focus exercises
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a master sorcerer teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You cast an invisible hook of will into a target. On a successful Occult vs target's Willpower Test, you establish a **thin link**: you feel their general emotional state (fear, rage, calm) and can tug it slightly, imposing **±10%** on one relevant social or Resolve Test per round. Breaking line of sight or losing concentration ends the link.
Modifiers: +10 if the target is unaware of you; –20 if they are actively resisting; Disadvantage against holy individuals or those under Faith protections.
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Grave Mirror Vision

Range/Area: Self; visions of a distant corpse or grave site
Duration: A few heartbeats
Power: 3
Study Time: 10 days spent meditating among bones and still water
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a necromantic seer instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: By placing your hand on a corpse or grave and closing your eyes, you briefly see through **another corpse's eyes** within a given radius (Director decides distance based on power and circumstances). The view is static and sensory-limited, but can reveal location, lighting, or nearby movement.
Modifiers: +10 when used on a freshly deceased body; –20 on very old remains; Disadvantage if the corpse has been heavily sanctified.
Presence Check: PRE –10; Failure: 1 Corruption.

Necrotic Surge

Range/Area: Self or one undead creature you touch
Duration: 1 combat
Power: 4
Study Time: 12 days of channeling practice on minor undead
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with undead-cult instructor, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You flood undead tissue with Grave Star power. The target undead gains **+10% to Attack and Damage** against living creatures for the duration, but suffers –10% Defense as its movements become more reckless. When the surge ends, the target takes a small amount of backlash damage.
Modifiers: +10 in areas of strong Choir influence; –20 on consecrated ground; Disadvantage if the target is a Ral or other bound undead resisting the surge.
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Black Ledger of Debts

Range/Area: Self; sense of unresolved deaths within 20 meters
Duration: 10 minutes
Power: 3
Study Time: 13 days compiling symbolic lists of the dead
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a Choir record-keeper or grim seer teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You call up an invisible ledger of obligation; you feel **knots of unresolved death** nearby —murder victims, unburied corpses, betrayed allies. You do not know names, but you sense direction and emotional weight (rage, sorrow, confusion). Skilled use can locate hidden bodies or identify sites of betrayal.
Modifiers: +10 in quiet places; –20 in battlefields packed with corpses; Disadvantage in temples dedicated to mercy or forgiveness.
Presence Check: PRE –10; Failure: 1 Corruption.

Wired Limbs of the Dead

Range/Area: One corpse or skeleton within 10 meters
Duration: 1 scene or until destroyed
Power: 5
Study Time: 18 days of corpse articulation and puppet-work
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a necromancer or Choir animator, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You jerk your fingers as if pulling invisible strings; a corpse or skeleton rises and moves under your control. It is clumsy but obedient, using simple attacks and tasks as a basic undead minion. When the spell ends, it collapses.
Modifiers: +10 on intact, recently dead bodies; –20 on badly damaged remains; Disadvantage if cast in front of strongly faithful witnesses (social fallout, not casting penalty).
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Star-Blotted Sky

Range/Area: 20-meter radius outdoors
Duration: A few rounds
Power: 6
Study Time: 22 days under open sky with forbidden constellations
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a high Choir cantor teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You raise your hand to the heavens and call for Athrakar's veil. For a short time, **unnatural darkness** descends in the chosen area; torches dim to embers, and only undead and Sorcery-sight perceive clearly. Living creatures suffer Disadvantage on Awareness and ranged attacks; undead gain Advantage in melee.
Modifiers: +10 at night; –20 at noon; Disadvantage on the casting roll if any strong Faith-based light is present (e.g., multiple relics).
Presence Check: PRE –30; Failure: 3 Corruption.

Whispering Hemorrhage

Range/Area: One living target within 10 meters
Duration: Instant; lingering effect for 1–2 days
Power: 5
Study Time: 17 days studying blood rituals and mortal anatomy
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a blood-sorcerer instructing, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You whisper the target's name (or a powerful descriptor) and gesture. On a successful Occult vs Endurance opposed Test, tiny unseen fissures open in their veins; they suffer immediate moderate damage and take an ongoing **–10% to physical actions and Endurance Tests** for the next day, unless treated magically or surgically.
Modifiers: +10 if you know the target's true name; –20 if you do not; Disadvantage against armored targets who are not visibly wounded.
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Pact of Borrowed Shadow

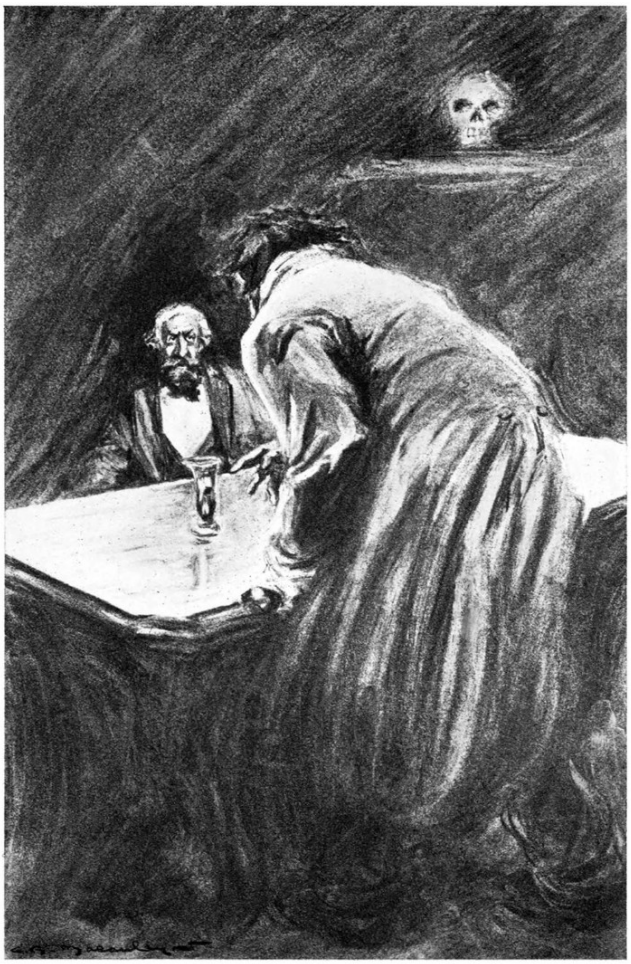
Range/Area: Self
Duration: 1 scene
Power: 4
Study Time: 15 days in darkness, bargaining with imagined or real voices
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a shadow-cultist teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You murmur an agreement with a lesser shadow-spirit. For the duration, your shadow moves slightly independent of you; it can distract observers, obscure objects, and grant you **+10% to Stealth and Deception** checks in dim light. The spirit may whisper suggestions or mocking commentary, at the Director's discretion.
Modifiers: +10 in low light; –20 in bright sun; Disadvantage in consecrated light or under holy fire.
Presence Check: PRE –20; Failure: 2 Corruption.

Grave Star Brand

Range/Area: Touch; one willing or helpless target
Duration: Permanent until dispelled
Power: 7
Study Time: 30 days of deep Choir texts and branding rituals
Learning: Scholar or INT –10; with a master Choir hierophant (or equivalent) teaching, INT +10/+20 and reduced Study Time
Description: You carve or burn a sigil into the target's flesh; when the ritual completes, they become **marked property of Athrakar**. They gain a minor boon (Director's choice: +10% to certain fear effects, easier to raise as undead, or similar), but also carry a spiritual tether. Faith spells that target them suffer –10%; Sorcery that targets them gains +10%. Removing the brand requires major Faith ritual.
Modifiers: +10 on fully willing targets; –20 on struggling or spiritually resistant ones; Disadvantage if cast in sight of strong Faith relics.
Presence Check: PRE –30; Failure: 4 Corruption.

Chapter 7: Boons of the Order

Gifts Carved into Bone and Oath



Faith prays.
Sorcery bargains.
Boons **change what you are**.

The Rals who survived the founding Rite were not meant to be merely walking corpses with swords. The ritual that tore them from the grave left **scars**: not only on flesh and bone, but on Essence, will, and memory. As the Order fought on—through lost wars, failed crusades, and retreats from cities that no longer exist—these scars deepened and **crystallised into patterns of power**.

Those patterns are called **Boons**.

Where a spell is a *thing you do*—a formula, a litany, a working—
a Boon is a *thing you have become*.

This chapter describes what Boons are in the grim world of *the Order of Ral*, how they differ from Faith and Sorcery, the three major families of Boons (Grave, Oath, and Battle), and how Protagonists gain and use them in play.

What Is a Boon?

Rals use the word "Boon" almost grudgingly.

It implies a gift. Most Rals know better than to think the world gives them anything freely. When they speak of Boons among themselves, they mean:

- **Changes to their undead bodies and Essence** hammered in by the Rite and refined by war.
- **Oath-scars** left by vows that have been kept through blood and failure.
- **Battle reflexes** honed past the point of mere training—those instant responses that blur the line between martial skill and miracle.

In rules terms, a **Boon is a permanent or semi-permanent advantage** tied to the Ral's nature, vows, or fighting art. It is not a Skill, not a spell, not a piece of gear. It is closer to:

- A **Trait** that bends the usual probabilities.
- A **flag** that tells the Director "this is what this knight is good at and what the story should feed."
- A **small, repeatable edge** that fits the One-on-One engine: +10% in specific contexts, Advantage in particular moves, once-per-scene permissions, or special ways to spend Destiny.

Boons are **not learned** from books, scrolls, or lectures. They are:

- **Awakened** by surviving certain experiences.
- **Sealed** by vows that cost the Ral something real.
- **Driven into bone** by the steady pressure of Athrakar's gaze and the stubborn refusal to belong to the Grave Star entirely.

Boons vs Faith vs Sorcery

Boons sit alongside Faith and Sorcery, but they are **not** another spell list. The differences matter.

Faith Spells

Faith, as described in the magick chapter, works through:

- **Prayer, litany, relics, and ritual.**
- **Skills** such as Theology, Invocation, or related devotions.
- **Essence** as a spendable resource.
- **Study Time** and formal learning.

To use Faith spells, a Ral:

1. Learns the spell over days of **study and practice**.
2. Makes a **Skill Test** when casting.
3. Pays **Essence**, and lives with success or DoF.

Faith is external: you call on something beyond you to act.

Sorcery Spells

Sorcery:

- Works through **Occult/Grave Lore** and forbidden diagrams.
- Requires **Essence** and always risks **Corruption** via a Presence check.
- Is explicitly transactional and corrupting.

To use Sorcery, a Ral:

1. Studies the spell as a technique.
2. Rolls to cast using a Sorcery-related Skill.
3. Pays Essence, then tests Presence to avoid Corruption.

Sorcery is parasitic: you open yourself to Athrakar's pull and hope you can close again.

Boons

Boons are neither of these.

- There is **no Study Time** for a Boon.
- There is **no spell Skill** for a Boon.
- There is often **no roll at all** to "turn it on"—it is simply part of who the Ral is now.

Boons may interact with Skills and tests (granting +10%, Advantage, special rerolls, or unique options for Destiny), but they themselves are:

- **Not cast.**
- **Not learned like a technique.**
- **Not forgotten** unless something goes very wrong (oath-breaking, extreme trauma, or deliberate renunciation).

Think of Boons as **permanent rule-bends** earned through character creation and advancement choices and sealed by story.

Mechanically, they behave more like:

- Traits.
- Stunts.
- Edges that describe "what happens when this knight does their thing."

Three Families of Boons

In *the Order of Ral*, Boons fall into three broad, overlapping families:

1. **Grave Boons** – gifts and curses of undeath itself.
2. **Oath Boons** – power drawn through vows, faith, and moral position.
3. **Battle Boons** – honed combat instincts, tactics, and killing arts.

A single Ral can possess Boons from all three families. The mix says a great deal about **who they have become**.

Grave Boons

Grave Boons are things the Ral could not have had in life.

They come from:

- The **founding Rite** that ripped them out of proper death.
- The constant, low thrum of **Athrakar's gravity** on their Essence.
- The way their bodies no longer behave exactly like mortal flesh.

Examples in concept:

- A Boon that lets the Ral **ignore bleeding** and certain types of pain penalties.
- A Boon that makes their **eyes see faint Grave Star auras** in total darkness.
- A Boon that allows their **undead mount to share sensory impressions** for a moment in battle.

Grave Boons often:

- Lean into **END, MGT, and PRE** (endurance and spiritual weight).
- Interact with **Corruption** thresholds (growing stronger or stranger as it rises).
- Come with **social costs**—more obviously monstrous, harder to pass among the living.

They are the "this is what being undead *does* for you" side of the system.

Oath Boons

Oath Boons are the **counterweight** to Grave Boons.

They are earned when:

- A Ral swears a true vow and **keeps it under pressure**.
- A saint or god, against their own doctrine, chooses to honor an undead champion.
- The Ral's **moral spine** refuses to bend in situations where most knights would break.

Examples in concept:

- A Boon that gives Advantage on **resisting mind control** when defending the helpless.
- A Boon that allows the Ral to **exert Presence** over terrified peasants or troops, calming or rallying them.
- A Boon that grants a **once-per-scene defensive miracle** when keeping a sworn watch.

Oath Boons:

- Lean into **PRE, AWR, and INT** (resolve, judgment, and command).
- Often **weaken or shut down** if the underlying oath is broken.
- May quietly **fail** in scenes where the Ral behaves in ways that blaspheme their chosen patron or principle.

Compared to Faith spells:

- Oath Boons do not require Theology or liturgical precision.
- They are less flexible, but **always on-message** with the vow that birthed them.

Battle Boons

Battle Boons are where training, undeath, and sheer repetition harden into something that looks like modest, repeatable miracle.

They represent:

- Thousands of charges and withdrawals.
- A lifetime of reading the weight of armor, the angle of approach, the gait of mounts.
- Knowing, instinctively, where to be **before** the enemy decides to attack.

Examples in concept:

- A Boon that grants +10% to **attack from horseback during a charge**, or Advantage on one opening strike each combat.
- A Boon that allows the Ral to **turn a failed Parry into a glancing blow** once per scene.
- A Boon that improves their ability to **coordinate with their mount**, sharing Advantage on certain Ride and weapon Tests.

Battle Boons:

- Lean into **MGT, GRC, AWR** and the Ral's martial Skills (Blades, Shields, Ride, Warfare).
- Rarely interact with Corruption directly (though a director can tie certain aggressive Boons to darker impulses).
- Make the Ral feel like a **professional killer refined by the grave, not a brawler with lucky dice**.

Gaining Boons

Because Boons are **not spells**, they are not learned through Study Time and Scholar Tests.

Instead, Rals gain Boons through:

1. **Character Creation**
2. **Advancement Milestones**
3. **Narrative Unlocks**

Boons at Character Creation

Newly created Rals begin play with:

1 Grave Boon – everyone starts with one core "death-knight" expression of the Grave Bond.

1 Oath *or* **Battle Boon** – player chooses whether their second Boon leans more toward vow/roleplay weight (Oath) or combat edge (Battle).

No Study Time, no roll: if the player selects the Boon and the Director approves the concept, the Ral simply begins play **already shaped that way**.

Advancement Milestones

Later Boons are gained the same way the rest of One-on-One advancement is earned:

- Through **completed arcs**,
- **Hard choices**,
- And Director-approved **growth moments**.

When the Protagonist reaches an appropriate threshold (up to you: a certain number of missions, a major Destiny event, or an explicit advancement step), the Director can offer:

> "Instead of—or alongside—a Skill increase, you may select a new Boon."

This keeps Boons riding the same rhythm as Skill advancement while ensuring they:

- Remain **rare enough** to be special.

- Represent actual **development**, not just optimization.

Narrative Unlocks

Some Boons should not be on the general shopping list at all.

They are **earned in-scene**, for specific Rals, at specific times:

- A Grave Boon awakened when the Ral survives something no living knight could.
- An Oath Boon born when the Ral keeps a promise against all reason.
- A Battle Boon that emerges mid-war, after repeated use of a particular tactic changes how they "read" the battlefield.

Mechanically, the Director can:

- Offer a **unique Boon** as a reward for a pivotal mission.
- Replace a planned generic reward with a tailored Boon tied to what just happened.

Narrative unlocks also serve as **levers for custom Boons** you design for a specific Protagonist.

Using Boons at the Table

Boons are intentionally **lightweight** in rules footprint. They mostly do one or more of the following:

- Grant a **+10% modifier** in a tightly defined context.
- Grant **Advantage** on a very particular kind of Test (e.g., the first social Test with devout NPCs, the first mounted charge each combat).
- Allow a **reroll** of a failed Test once per scene or session, under clear conditions.
- Enable a specific "**once per scene" special move** that augments existing mechanics (extra damage on a charge, special defense when protecting someone, etc.).
- Modify how the Ral can **spend Destiny** (e.g., certain Boons might allow a Destiny spend to also shift Corruption, or to protect their mount).

When a Boon triggers:

- **You do not roll to see if it works.** You simply apply its effect to the existing roll, test, or fiction.
- You may still make a Skill or Attribute Test as usual; the Boon shifts the odds in your favor.

Boons should never require the table to:

- Track a separate spell slot system.
- Manage a second Essence pool.
- Consult complex timing trees.

They should read as "**if X, then give the player this simple edge**".

Boons, Essence, and Corruption

Boons do not generally spend Essence to function.

They are **settled changes**, not active workings. However, there are a few ways they can interact with the Essence and Corruption engines:

- Some Boons may **reduce Essence costs** of certain Faith spells in narrow circumstances (e.g., a saint-favored Oath Boon) or **alter the recovery pace** in specific conditions.
- Some Grave Boons may **scale with Corruption**, gaining stronger effects as the Ral sinks deeper into Athrakar's pull—at the cost of social and spiritual consequences.

- Certain Oath Boons might **fail** or even twist if Corruption crosses a threshold, reflecting that faith and undeath have finally parted ways.

Any Boon that touches Corruption should do so:

- With **clear thresholds** ("At Corruption 60+, this Boon weakens / strengthens / warps").
- In ways that are **predictable to the player**, even if the in-world explanation is grimly mysterious.

Boons must not become a backdoor to:

- Quietly negate Corruption costs of Sorcery.
- Render the undead state consequence-free.

They are **edges**, not escapes.

Losing or Warping Boons

Boons are hard-won, but not untouchable.

They can be:

- **Suppressed**, especially Oath Boons, when the Ral breaks the underlying vow.
- **Warped**, particularly Grave Boons, if Corruption is allowed to spike unchecked.
- **Blocked**, temporarily, in zones of intense Faith or Choir domination.

The Director should treat Boon loss or distortion as **major events**, on par with serious Wounds or Destiny expenditures:

- An Oath Boon may go silent after an act of clear betrayal until the Ral undertakes penance, makes restitution, or forges a new, darker vow.
- A Grave Boon tied to resilience might twist, giving the Ral frightening durability but making it harder to appear human or to rest among the living.
- A Battle Boon can be **trauma-locked** if a catastrophic defeat undermines the Ral's confidence, only returning when they redeem that moment.

When you threaten a Boon, you are signalling that **the story has hit something central** about this knight. Use that power rarely but meaningfully.

Designing and Selecting Boons

The detailed lists of **Grave, Oath, and Battle Boons** later in this chapter provide ready-made options with:

- Names,
- Narrative hooks, and
- Tight, table-ready mechanical effects (+10%, Advantage, once-per-scene, etc.).

When designing new Boons, keep these principles:

1. **Narrow and strong, not broad and blurry.**
    - "+10% to all attacks" is too wide.
    - "+10% to the first mounted attack made in a combat, if you charged at least 6 meters" is sharp and thematic.
2. **Trigger from story, not bookkeeping.**
    - Use fictionally obvious conditions: "when defending the helpless," "when riding through arrow fire," "when breaking a siege line."
3. **Integrate with existing levers.**
    - Prefer +10% modifiers, Advantage/Disadvantage, rerolls, or special uses of Destiny over brand-new mini-systems.
4. **Make the cost implicit in the fiction.**

- Many Boons carry narrative obligations: certain behaviors become "expected" for the Ral (protecting pilgrims, never abandoning a post, riding into the worst of the fighting).

Boons in the Tone of the Order

In a lighter game, Boons might be flashy, heroic powers.

In **The Order of Ral**, they are **scars that help you kill things and keep walking**:

- Grave Boons are quiet reminders that you no longer belong among the living.
- Oath Boons mark you as one of the few things the old saints still tolerate—and they watch closely.
- Battle Boons are simply proof that you have ridden into horror often enough that the body and Essence have learned to cheat a little.

On the character sheet, Boons look like small rule exceptions. In play, they should feel like the difference between dying in the first twenty minutes of the story and making it to the last chapter.

The Three Families of Boons (Grave, Oath, Battle)

Remember:

- Boons are **not spells**. No Study Time, no casting rolls, no Essence costs.
- They are **traits baked into the Ral's undeath and history**.
- Each one should be **chosen**, **earned**, or **unlocked** through character creation, advancement, or narrative events.

Mechanically, they lean on One-on-One's existing levers:

- +10% / –10% modifiers
- Advantage / Disadvantage
- Converting **Fail → Lesser Win** in tightly constrained situations
- Occasional special interactions with **Destiny**, **Essence**, or **Corruption**

GRAVE BOONS

Scars Bestowed by Undeath

These Boons represent what the Rite and ongoing existence under Athrakar's sky have made of the Ral's body and Essence.

Grave Boon: Death's Indifference

In life, pain was a warning. In undeath, it is just noise you can choose to ignore.

Your nerves remember to scream; your will remembers how to refuse.

Effect:

- You suffer **no penalties from Light Wounds** to physical actions (ignore the usual Light Wound mechanical penalty).
- When making **Endurance (END) Tests** to resist fatigue, torture, or environmental hardship, you gain **+10%**.
- Once per scene, when a physical attack would impose an additional penalty due to pain (Director's call), you may declare *Death's Indifference* and treat that penalty as halved or negated.

This does not stop you from taking damage or Wounds; it simply reflects that your body's complaints no longer control you.

Grave Boon: Hollow-Breath Senses

The air around you never smells clean. Beneath every breeze you catch the faint taste of grave dust, rot, and the cold tang of Sorcery.

Your undead senses tune themselves to disturbances in that constant, dead background noise.

Effect:

- You gain **+10% to Awareness (AWR) Tests** to notice undead, fresh graves, or areas of recent mass death within a reasonable radius (Director's discretion).
- When entering a location heavily tainted by **Choir/Sorcery**, you may ask the Director one of:
    - "Is there active necromancy here?"
    - "Has something died violently here recently?"
      They must answer honestly, though not in detail.
- Once per scene, you may gain **Advantage** on one Awareness Test to detect an **ambush or concealed undead presence**.

Grave Boon: Bone-Deep Resilience

Your bones have learned how to hold together when they should not.

Cracks knit with unnatural speed; splinters grind back into alignment under the Grave Star's pressure.

Effect:

- You gain **+10% to Endurance (END) Tests** to resist being stunned, knocked unconscious, or incapacitated by physical trauma.
- Once per session, after a combat ends, you may **downgrade one Medium Wound to a Light Wound**, or erase a single Light Wound entirely, as your body re-sets itself with creaking.
- On any combat round where you suffer damage but not a new Wound tier, you gain **Advantage** on your next Endurance Test that scene.

Grave Boon: Star-Cooled Flesh

Heat does not claim you the way it does the living; your Essence has been pressed into a colder state.

Your flesh feels like stone left in winter shadow.

Effect:

- You ignore **environmental penalties from heat and moderate cold** (desert sun, winter travel, basic exposure). Extreme supernatural cold or fire still affects you normally unless otherwise stated.
- You gain **+10% to Endurance Tests** against mundane fire, smoke inhalation, and heat exhaustion.
- When standing in intense conditions (burning buildings, plague pyres, desert sieges), you gain **Advantage on Morale/Resolve Tests** to keep acting while others falter.

Grave Boon: Grave-Rider's Link

The Rite did not just alter you—it threaded a strand of your Essence permanently into your mount.

You feel the echo of the grave through hooves and bone.

Requirements: Must have a bound undead War-Horse (Companion mount).

Effect:

- You always know your mount's **exact direction and rough state** (calm, in danger, wounded) within several kilometers, even if Bond is only 1.
- When you are mounted, you gain **+10% to Ride Tests**, and your mount gains **+10% to Athletics** when executing maneuvers you direct verbally (charges, sharp turns, leaps).
- Once per scene, you and your mount may each **re-roll one failed Ride or Athletics Test** tied to staying together (avoiding separation, resisting forced dismount, etc.), taking the better result.

This Boon stacks naturally with higher **Bond** ratings but does not replace them.

Grave Boon: Quietus-Scarred Aura

You have seen too many Rals fall into true Quietus.

The manner of their end—the way Essence unspooled from their husks—has left a mark on you that others feel without understanding.

Effect:

- Living NPCs with any sense for danger instinctively flinch around you. You gain **+10% to Intimidate/Presence-based Tests** that rely on quiet menace or "dead knight" reputation.
- Undead and Choir agents **take you more seriously**: once per scene, when you attempt a non-combat social interaction with an undead or Choir servant, you may gain **Advantage** if you invoke your experience with Quietus and final deaths.
- When witnessing another Ral's Quietus, you may immediately recover **1 Essence** as the Grave Star's pressure shifts for a moment; this can occur at most once per session.

OATH BOONS

Power Sealed in Vows

These Boons crystallize when a Ral swears a vow and keeps it under conditions that should have broken it.

They are half Faith, half stubbornness.

Oath Boon: Vow of the Helpless

You swore, in life or undeath, that as long as you could still move, you would not abandon the defenseless.

The world has taken that promise seriously.

Effect:

- When you are **actively defending clearly helpless or non-combatant NPCs** (children, infirm, unarmed peasants) in a scene, you gain:
  - **+10% to Attack and Defense** Tests,
  - **Advantage on Morale/Resolve Tests** vs fear.
- Once per scene, if an attack or effect would bypass you and strike one of those protected, you may spend **1 Destiny** to **interpose**—treat the attack as if it targets you instead (use your Defense, armor, etc.).
- If you **ever willingly abandon** such NPCs to certain slaughter for selfish reasons, this Boon goes **dormant** until the Director judges you have made serious atonement.

Oath Boon: Last Watch Undying

You have stood too many night watches over too many broken walls.

You have vowed that if someone is under your watch, they will not die because you fell asleep.

Effect:

- When you are on **active watch** for a camp, stronghold wall, or guarded chamber, you gain **Advantage on Awareness Tests** to detect intrusion or danger.
- Once per night (or equivalent rest period), you may convert a **failed Awareness Test into a Lesser Win** if that failure would lead to being surprised in your watch area.
- You require **less rest than the living**: you can maintain a functional level of alertness on half the usual sleep needed by mortals, though you still need occasional periods of stillness to recover Essence.

If you consistently neglect watch duty for trivial reasons, the Director may suppress this Boon until you reaffirm the vow.

Oath Boon: Burden of the Living

Some Rals resent the living. You do not.

You have chosen to carry their fear, anger, and confusion as part of your penance, not as an excuse to scorn them.

Effect:

- When interacting with **common folk who know what you are** (or strongly suspect it), you gain **+10% to social Skills** (Persuasion, Reassurance, etc.) if you act with visible restraint and respect.
- Once per scene, when a crowd or group of civilians is on the brink of panic, you may gain **Advantage on a Presence-based Test** to steady them—provided you are not using direct threats or Sorcery.
- If you commit **needless cruelty** against innocents in their view, tests to influence them become **Disadvantaged** until you undertake clear reparative actions.

Oath Boon: Standard of the Fallen

In life you bore banners or holy symbols into battle. In undeath, you bear nothing but your scars and your title—but some part of that old duty remains.

When you take the field, others unconsciously align around you.

Effect:

- When you are **visibly present** and not hiding what you are, allied mortal troops in your immediate vicinity (a unit, handful of guards, militia, etc.) gain **+10% to Morale/Resolve Tests** as long as you stand and fight.
- Once per combat, if those allies would break and flee due to a failed Morale Test, you may spend **1 Destiny** to allow a **re-roll with Advantage**, so long as you commit to staying in the fight yourself.
- If you flee a battle purely out of self-preservation while those troops hold, this Boon may weaken or be lost at the Director's discretion.

Oath Boon: Chain-Bound to Duty

You have tied your continued existence to a specific duty: hold a pass, protect a bloodline, see a campaign finished.

So long as that duty persists, some things simply do not kill you as easily as they should.

Effect:

- Once per session, when an attack or effect would **reduce you to 0 Vitality or inflict**

Quietus outright, you may declare that your duty is not yet done and:

- Remain at **1 Vitality** instead,
- Or reduce the severity of the fatal Wound by one step (e.g., from fatal to Severe),
  at the cost of **1 Destiny** and a permanent **scar or mark** chosen with the Director.

- You gain **+10% to Resolve Tests** when someone tries to persuade you to abandon that duty prematurely.
- If you ever formally betray or deliberately abandon the defined duty, this Boon is lost and may not be regained without a new, equal or greater vow.

Oath Boon: Saint's Shadow Tolerance

Some saint—or something like a saint—has decided to tolerate your existence.

You have no guarantee of salvation, but you are not entirely abandoned either.

Effect:

- When you are targeted by **Faith-based effects** that would harm or repel undead (turning attempts, certain wards), you gain **+10% to any Resist or Presence Test** to endure or ignore them.
- Once per scene, when using a **Faith spell** that aligns with your saint's domain (Director's call), you may **re-roll** a failed Theology or casting Test and take the better result. No extra Essence cost.
- If you abuse holy sites, relics, or the faithful of that saint, the Director may flip this Boon: you temporarily **suffer Disadvantage** vs such Faith effects instead, until you reconcile or accept the loss.

BATTLE BOONS

Reflexes Tempered by War

These Boons are where training, undeath, and repetition combine into weapons-grade instinct.

Battle Boon: Grave Charge Mastery

Your entire existence has been reduced to one simple geometry: the line between your lance (or sword), your mount's momentum, and the enemy who fails to move.

You have learned to ride that line like a blade.

Effect:

- The **first mounted charge attack you make in a combat** (you must move at least 6 meters in a straight or near-straight line) gains:
  - **+20% to Attack**, and
  - If it hits, you may add **+1 damage step** (Director fits this to your damage rules, e.g., 1d8 → 1d10 or +2 flat).
- On any mounted charge you make, if you score a **Critical success**, you may immediately force the target (or formation) to make a **Morale/Resolve Test at –10%**.
- If you routinely use this Boon against clearly non-military targets (townsfolk, non-resisting enemies), the Director may attach social or Oath consequences.

Battle Boon: Harrowed Parry

You have been disarmed, knocked from the saddle, and cut open enough times that your body moves before your mind fully understands the pattern.

You turn killing blows into glancing strikes through a reflex that is half training, half superstition.

Effect:

- Once per scene, when you **fail a Defense Test against a melee attack**, you may declare *Harrowed Parry* and treat that failure as a **Lesser Win instead**:
    - The blow lands, but damage is reduced or converted to a less severe Wound (Director's call within your wound tier structure).
- You gain **+10% to Defense Tests** when parrying attacks you can clearly see and anticipate (no blind-side or surprise benefit).
- If you are ever rendered Helpless or fully surprised, this Boon offers no benefit for that particular attack—your instincts need a fraction of a heartbeat to work.

Battle Boon: One-Knight Shield Wall

Your destrier and shield fill more space than a single warrior should.

You have learned how to use angles, barding, and your undead body to create a mobile barricade.

Effect:

- When you fight **on foot with a shield**, adjacent allies who are directly behind you (relative to the enemy) gain **+10% to Defense** vs ranged and frontal melee attacks.
- When you fight **mounted with a shield**, any ally riding beside or slightly behind your flank gains **partial cover** against incoming missile attacks (Director interprets as e.g. –10% to hit them).
- Once per combat, you may declare a **Shield Wall Stand**:
    - You and one adjacent ally gain **Advantage on Defense Tests** for one round while you hold position and do not move more than a step.

Battle Boon: Quietus-Edge Technique

You have come to understand that there is a moment—between breath, between heartbeats—where a blow can be turned from "wound" to "ending."

You have adjusted your strikes to seek that moment, especially against the undead and the Choir's servants.

Effect:

- When attacking **undead or Choir agents**, you gain **+10% to Attack** with your primary melee weapon.
- On a **Critical hit** against such targets, you may choose one:
    - Inflict an **additional Wound tier** of appropriate severity,
    - Or apply a **crippling effect** (shattered limb, broken weapon, etc.) agreed with the Director.
- Once per combat, if you reduce an undead foe to Quietus, you regain **1 Essence** as the Grave Star's pull on that piece of the world slackens.

Battle Boon: Battlefield Reader

You have ridden through enough chaos that your mind now treats battle like a legible script.

Lines of advance, fields of fire, and morale waves all appear to you as if outlined in cold light.

Effect:

- You gain **+10% to Warfare/Strategy or Tactics-related Tests** when assessing a battlefield or planning maneuvers.
- At the start of a combat where you had **even a brief moment to survey** the situation, you may ask the Director one tactical question ("Where is the weakest part of their line?", "What will break first if this fight continues?"). They must answer truthfully, though at whatever level of detail fits the fiction.
- Once per combat, you may grant **+10% to an ally's single Attack or Defense Test** by shouting a warning or instruction, as long as you can see them and the situation.

Battle Boon: Grave-Rider's Rhythm

You and your mount move as one, not in the poetic sense, but in the brutally practical timing of hooves, weight, and killing arcs.

Requirements: Must have a bound undead War-Horse.

Effect:

- You gain **+10% to Ride Tests** to keep your seat, control your mount in chaos, or perform combat maneuvers.
- Once per scene, when you **succeed on a Ride Test with a high DoS** to avoid a fall, leap a barrier, or dart through danger, you may immediately apply **+10% to your next mounted Attack** in the same sequence.
- If your mount has a **Bond 3+** with you, you and the Director can narrate more elaborate joint actions (leaping strikes, synchronized feints) and you may treat **mount and rider initiative as one slot** (Director's pacing preference).

Battle Boon: Terror of the Bone-Rider

You have leaned into what you are: a corpse in armor on a corpse of a horse riding into living lines.

You have learned to weaponize that horror.

Effect:

- When you **enter melee for the first time in a combat** at a visible gallop on your undead mount, living enemies who can clearly see you must make a **Morale/Resolve Test**:
  - On failure, they suffer **–10% to Attack against you** for the next round as their nerve falters.
- You gain **+10% to Intimidate Tests** made immediately after a violent display from the saddle (trampling, decapitating, scattering foes).
- Once per session, you may spend **1 Destiny** to treat a single Intimidate Test against a shaken enemy unit as if you had rolled a **Critical success**, turning a wavering line into a rout—unless the Director determines they are fanatics or magically bolstered beyond fear.

Chapter 8: Mounts of the Order of Ral

The Grave-Bound Companions

The living call them nightmares, corpse-steeds, bone-chargers.

To the **Order of Ral**, they are simply **Companions**.

Every Ral bears a title and a grave-mark; every Ral also bears a shadow at their side in the form of an undead war-horse bound by oaths, sigils, and Essence. These are not generic beasts reanimated for convenience. Each mount is a **named presence**, a constant witness to campaigns, retreats, desperate charges, and Quietus.

In this chapter, you will find:

- The lore of the **bone-stables** and the Rite that binds mount and Ral.
- The baseline **Death War-Horse** used by most of the Order.
- Six **named Grave Mounts**—famous Companions whose legends already haunt the Chapterhouse.

Mechanically, a Ral's mount is their **primary Companion**: a persistent, mechanically significant ally whose **Grave Bond** (1–5) shapes what they can do together.

The Bone-Stables and the Rite of Binding

The Chapterhouse stables do not smell of hay and sweat. They smell of **cold iron, dried leather, and old incense** burned to keep the worst whispers out of the rafters.

The Order does not breed horses anymore. That age is gone. Instead they **collect them**:

- Veteran destriers pulled half-eaten from battlefields.
- Starved farm-mounts found dead in their harnesses, still facing the plow.
- Noble coursers, slain in riots or pogroms, hooves tangled in broken flags.

Ral Parthanus decreed early in the Order's history:

> "We will not waste the courage of beasts that died doing *our* work."

The Bone-Smiths

Within the Chapterhouse there are a handful of specialists—**bone-smiths** and **grave farriers**—who do for horses what the founding rite did for the Rals. They:

- Strip ruined flesh, reinforce bone, and gird skeletons with **barding made from scavenged plates**, leather, and mail.
- Paint warding sigils in soot and blood along vertebrae and limb-bones.

- Hammer new shoes onto hooves that no longer feel heat, cold, or pain.

Their work walks a knife edge between Faith and Sorcery. Officially, their methods are "divine concessions"—practical necessities on a battlefield where the dead already rise. Unofficially, more than one bone-smith has been burned in effigy in cities that learn what the Order really rides.

The Grave Bond

A mount is not truly a Companion until the **Grave Bond** is forged.

The Rite is always the same:

1. The Ral and the chosen corpse-steed stand in the stable circle, surrounded by candles and iron.
2. Names are spoken—those the horse bore in life, if known, and the name it will bear in death.
3. The Ral bleeds into the horse's open mouth.
4. A sigil of Ral Parthanus is drawn on saddle and skull alike.
5. Essence flows. For a moment, both knight and horse see flashes of each other's last moments as living beings.

When it is done, the creature opens its eyes again as a **Death War-Horse**—or as one of the rarer, named Companions whose essence and legend refuse anonymity.

The Bond is not love. It is not ownership. It is an **oath of mutual service under the shadow of Quietus**. As the Bond grows (1–5), mount and Ral:

- Anticipate each other's movements.
- Share instincts for danger and opportunity.
- Endure, together, the creeping weight of Corruption and battlefield memory.

The Grave Bond Rating (Summary)

Mounts use the **Grave Bond** rating (1–5), parallel to Companions:

- **Bond 1 (Newly Bound)** – A functional undead mount, no extra bonuses.
- **Bond 2 (Standard Start)** – +10% to mount **Morale/Discipline**; the Ral senses its direction/condition within a few kilometers.
- **Bond 3** – +10% to the mount's **Attack and Athletics**, plus one improvement:
  - +3 Vitality, **or**
  - +10% to one key Skill, **or**
  - +1 Armor Rating (AR), up to a maximum of **+2 AR from Bond**.
- **Bond 4** – Mount becomes **immune to fear**; once per scene, it may ignore difficult terrain penalties for a Move/Charge (or as specified per mount).
- **Bond 5** – The mount gains a **unique Mount Boon** and operates with **near-human intelligence** in tactics and problem-solving.

The Director tracks Bond as a long-term relationship: missions ridden together, sacrifices made for each other, and the Ral's choices regarding **how** they treat their Companion.

Baseline Grave Mount: Death War-Horse

Not every Ral rides a legend.

Most ride a **Death War-Horse**: a stalwart, unnamed destrier whose courage in life and stubbornness in death make it suitable for the Order's work. Dozens stand in the stables at any time; some will never be named, yet still stand watch through decades of campaigns.

In fiction, the Director can describe these as:

- Bone-plated destriers with empty, ember-lit sockets.
- Once-fine horses now scarred and patched, barded in mismatched plates from a dozen lost lords.
- Silent, tireless silhouettes lined up beneath rafters hung with old harness and dead banners.

Death War-Horse — Generic Template

Type: Undead War-Horse
Role: Standard heavy cavalry mount

Attributes:

- Might (MGT): 75
- Grace (GRC): 55
- Endurance (END): 75
- Awareness (AWR): 50
- Presence (PRE): 50

Vitality: 4
Armor Rating (AR): 2 (rotting barding and bone)
Move: 12

Primary Attacks:

- **Trample:** 55% to hit, moderate damage (1d8+2)
- **Hoof Strike:** 50% to hit, moderate damage (1d8)

Skills:

- Athletics 55%
- Awareness 40%
- Morale/Discipline 60%

Traits:

- **Undead:** no fatigue; immune to disease and fear of blood.
- **Stable Platform:** rider gains +10% to mounted attack Tests vs being jostled.

Bond Boon at Bond 5 – Grave Gallop
Once per scene, the horse can double its Move for one round and ignores difficult terrain; attacks against it and its rider suffer –20% until the start of its next turn.

This template covers most Order mounts. But some steeds become something more.

Named Grave Mounts (Companion Steeds)

The following six mounts are **named Companions**, each with their own reputation in the Order's stories. A Protagonist does not typically start with one of these unless the Director explicitly permits it; instead, they are gained through **missions, visions, or unique stables-scenes**.

Directors can treat them as:

- **Upgrades** to a generic Death War-Horse when Bond and story justify it.
- **Rewards** for a major arc, such as reclaiming a lost Chapterhouse or liberating a cursed stud-farm.
- **Legacies**, passed from a Quietus-fallen Ral to a successor who proves worthy.

BLACKMANE VAROS, THE SIEGE CHARGER

They say Blackmane Varos has taken more gates than some kings have opened in their reign.

In life, Varos was bred in a border lord's siege stables, a massive black destrier trained to walk calmly beneath falling stone and boiling oil. When that lord's fortress fell to the Choir, Varos was found in the rubble, three legs broken, still trying to rise and charge.

Ral Parthanus ordered the body taken to the bone-smiths.

Now Varos stands as a towering shape in the deepest stall of the bone-stables. His coat is charcoal and soot, scarred where flesh once burned away. His mane hangs in thick, black cords. His eyes glow like banked coals under a crumbling wall.

Varos does not startle. He tolerates the crash of collapsing stone and the screams of the dying with the same heavy patience. Rals say standing beside him feels like leaning against a gate that has not yet fallen—but will.

Blackmane Varos — Stat Template

Type: Undead War-Horse (Siege Destrier)
Role: Heavy cavalry, line-breaker, gate-crasher

Attributes:

- MGT: 85
- GRC: 50
- END: 85
- AWR: 50
- PRE: 55

Wounds: 5
Armor Rating (AR): 3 (heavy bone plating and reinforced barding)
Move: 10

Primary Attacks:

- **Crushing Hooves:** 55% to hit, 1d10+2
- **Gate-Ram Charge (special):** 50% to hit, 1d10+2; on a hit, target must pass a Hard Might/Endurance Test or be knocked prone.

Skills:

- Athletics 60%
- Morale/Discipline 65%
- Awareness 35%

Traits:

- **Undead**
- **Siege-Bred:** Advantage on Tests to resist fear from loud noises, collapsing structures, and massed enemy ranks.
- **Living Bulwark:** When the Ral uses Varos to interpose between an enemy and an ally, that ally gains +10% to Defense vs that attack.

Bond Scaling (Varos)

- **Bond 1:** As statted.
- **Bond 2 – Shared Sieges:** +10% Morale/Discipline; the Ral senses Varos's direction and condition within a few kilometers.
- **Bond 3 – Iron Advance:** +10% Attack & Athletics; plus one improvement (+3 Vitality, or +10% key Skill, or +1 AR, up to +2 from Bond).
- **Bond 4 – Fearless Under Fire:** Immune to fear; once per scene, Varos may ignore difficult terrain penalties for a Move/Charge.
- **Bond 5 – Siege Breaker (Mount Boon):** Once per scene, when Varos performs a charge of at least 8 meters against a line of enemies, a barricade, or a gate, treat it as a **Line Break**:
  - Varos and rider gain +20% to Attack for that charge.
  - Enemies in the path must pass Hard Might/Agility or be knocked prone or forced aside.
  - Against doors or light fortifications, apply an extra damage step or count the charge as one full "breach success" toward breaking them.

Earning Blackmane Varos

Varos is not given to the first Ral who asks.

Sample hooks:

- **The Fallen Gate:** The Protagonist must ride through the ruins of the fortress where Varos died, confronting memories of the siege and reclaiming his skull from a Choir reliquary.
- **Trial of the Broken Wall:** Varos will only bond to a Ral who stands firm during a hopeless defense and refuses to abandon civilians—even when ordered to retreat.
- **Siege Oath:** The Ral swears never to use Varos for petty intimidation, only for the storming or defense of truly critical strongpoints.

ASH-MARE LETHRA, THE NIGHT COURSER

Ash-Mare Lethra is the stable's ghost of twilight.

In life, she was a hunter's mare, used by a noble retinue to chase poachers through tangled woodland and fen. She died in a marsh-ambush, ridden down by undead hounds; her rider's last act was to turn her toward the trees and whisper a single word: "Run."

When she was recovered, half submerged in peat, the bone-smiths found her skeleton strangely intact, her hooves still planted as if ready for the next stride.

In undeath, Lethra is lank and narrow, her hide the color of smoke-stained parchment. Her mane hangs in damp-looking strands, and her hooves land with unnerving softness. She turns her head at distant sounds well before others notice them. She is most comfortable away from crowds, threading between trees, ruins, and alleyways.

Ash-Mare Lethra — Stat Template

Type: Undead War-Horse (Night Courser)
Role: Scout, flanker, stealth-capable cavalry

Attributes:

- MGT: 70
- GRC: 70
- END: 70
- AWR: 60
- PRE: 50

Wounds: 4
Armor Rating (AR): 2 (light bone ridges and shadow-draped barding)
Move: 13

Primary Attacks:

- **Hoof Strike:** 55% to hit, 1d8+1
- **Biting Lunge:** 50% to hit, 1d8

Skills:

- Athletics 60%
- Stealth 50%
- Awareness 50%
- Morale/Discipline 55%

Traits:

- **Undead**
- **Night-Sense:** No penalties to Awareness in dim light; sees clearly under moon/starlight.
- **Soft Step:** At or below normal pace, enemies suffer –10% to Awareness to hear/notice her approach.

Bond Scaling (Lethra)

- **Bond 1:** As statted.
- **Bond 2 – Whispered Paths:** +10% Morale/Discipline; Ral senses her direction and emotional tone (tense, calm, alarmed).
- **Bond 3 – Shadowed Gallop:** +10% Attack & Athletics; plus one improvement. Lethra also gains +10% to Stealth at night.
- **Bond 4 – Fearless in the Dark:** Immune to fear; once per scene, can move through forest,

ruins, or urban rubble as open ground for one Move.

- **Bond 5 – Veil-of-Ash Gallop (Mount Boon):** Once per scene, Lethra and rider may perform a **Veil-of-Ash Gallop** for one round:
    - They are partially obscured by drifting ash and shadow.
    - Ranged attacks against them suffer –20%.
    - Enemies suffer –10% Awareness to track their path.
    - At night, they gain Advantage on Stealth that round.

Earning Ash-Mare Lethra

Hooks to bind Lethra:

- **The Marsh Hunt:** The Ral must lead a night pursuit through cursed wetlands, refusing to abandon a fleeing village caravan. Lethra appears in the swamp fog, pacing the Ral's horse, and only bonds if the Ral stays with the weakest riders.
- **The Poacher's Ghost:** The Ral uncovers the story of Lethra's former rider—a forgotten noble hunter wrongly branded outlaw—and rights a lingering injustice, freeing Lethra's spirit to choose her new knight.
- **Oath of the Silent Ride:** The Ral vows that Lethra will not be used for spectacle or parades —only for **covert rides, rescues, and night missions**.

OLD IRONHOOF, THE VETERAN

Old Ironhoof is older than many of the Rals who stable beside him.

His bones are thick and scarred, covered in the remnants of at least three different barding sets. Old fractures show in reinforced ridges; his hooves are dark and heavily shod. Each step rings like a muted anvil on stone. He has outlived banners, houses, and even a Chapterhouse that fell; he was led, piece by piece, out of its ruins and reassembled.

Ironhoof does not hurry. He does not flinch. He will stand where the Ral plants him, under arrow-storm or corpse-tide, until either the line holds or everything falls on top of him.

Old Ironhoof — Stat Template

Type: Undead War-Horse (Veteran Charger)
Role: Heavy cavalry, anchoring mount, defensive companion

Attributes:

- MGT: 80
- GRC: 50
- END: 90
- AWR: 50
- PRE: 60

Wounds: 6
Armor Rating (AR): 3 (layered bone and scavenged plate)
Move: 9

Primary Attacks:

- **Iron Hooves:** 55% to hit, 1d10+1
- **Shoulder Bash:** 45% to hit; on a hit, opposed Might Test to push/stagger.

Skills:

- Athletics 55%
- Morale/Discipline 70%
- Awareness 35%

Traits:

- **Undead**
- **Battle-Hardened:** Advantage on Tests to resist knockdown, forced movement, sudden loud shocks.
- **Anchor in the Storm:** Allies within 2 meters gain +10% to Morale/Resolve while he stands firm.

Bond Scaling (Ironhoof)

- **Bond 1:** As statted.
- **Bond 2 – Tempered Trust:** +10% Morale/Discipline; Ral senses whether he is engaged, waiting, or under attack.
- **Bond 3 – Layered Plating:** +10% Attack & Athletics; plus one improvement (often +3 Vitality or +1 AR).
- **Bond 4 – Unmoving Bastion:** Immune to fear; once per scene, Ironhoof ignores all push/knockdown/dismount effects for one round.
- **Bond 5 – Wall of Bone and Steel (Mount Boon):**
  Once per scene, when bracing:
  - Ironhoof and rider gain +20% to all defensive Tests vs charges and forced movement.
  - Enemies who charge them and fail to hit must pass Hard Might or be knocked prone.

Earning Old Ironhoof

Possible routes:

- **The Last Stand:** The Ral survives a doomed defense, refusing to fall back when ordered, holding a gate or bridge long enough for civilians to escape. Ironhoof is led from the stables afterward and accepts their hand.
- **Beneath the Collapsed Chapterhouse:** The Ral crawls through rubble to recover Ironhoof's skull and breastplate from a destroyed Order outpost, promising to rebuild.
- **Oath of Steadfastness:** The Ral swears not to abandon wounded allies lightly; Ironhoof will not bond with those who flee to save themselves.

PALE-STEP THREN, THE ROAD-RUNNER

There is a quiet superstition among Rals: if you dream of endless roads and never see the end, Pale-Step Thren is near.

Thren was once a courier mount, carrying dispatches between distant fortresses and shrines. He died of exhaustion on a winter road, collapsing a mere stone's throw from his destination. Monks found his body frozen in harness, still facing the road ahead.

As an undead mount, Thren looks stretched and rangy, his long limbs built for distance. His coat is grey and mottled, like ash on snow. He never seems entirely at rest; his hooves tap the stall floor as if counting beats between journeys.

Pale-Step Thren — Stat Template

Type: Undead War-Horse (Endurance Courser)
Role: Long-range scout, messenger, campaign mount

Attributes:

- MGT: 70
- GRC: 65
- END: 85
- AWR: 55
- PRE: 55

Wounds: 4
Armor Rating (AR): 2 (light bone plates and reinforced hide)
Move: 13

Primary Attacks:

- **Hoof Strike:** 50% to hit, 1d8
- **Running Kick:** 45% to hit, 1d8+1; may be used as part of disengaging movement.

Skills:

- Athletics 60%
- Endurance/Long Travel 65%
- Awareness 45%
- Morale/Discipline 60%

Traits:

- **Undead**
- **Road-True:** Advantage on endurance-related movement Tests; can maintain steady pace unusually long.
- **Sure Pacer:** Group overland travel pace can be modestly increased without extra fatigue (Director adjudicates).

Bond Scaling (Thren)

- **Bond 1:** As statted.
- **Bond 2 – Shared Miles:** +10% Morale/Discipline; Ral senses whether Thren is moving, resting, or stressed.
- **Bond 3 – Tireless Trot:** +10% Attack & Athletics; plus one improvement; +10% to Endurance/Travel Skill.
- **Bond 4 – Unflagging March:** Immune to fear; once per scene or travel segment, ignore terrain-based speed/fatigue penalties for one leg of the journey.
- **Bond 5 – Grave-Road Runner (Mount Boon):**
  Once per session, Thren and rider can **extend a day's travel** beyond normal limits without extra fatigue; in a chase, they gain Advantage on all contested movement checks for one full round of extended gallop.

Earning Pale-Step Thren

Hook ideas:

- **The Failed Message:** The Ral recovers a long-delayed dispatch from Thren's frozen remains and **delivers it at last**, decades late. In gratitude—or irony—Thren rises to serve them.
- **Pilgrim Road of Bones:** The Ral undertakes a grueling pilgrimage along an abandoned route choked with undead, walking or riding generic mounts until Thren appears on the last leg.
- **Oath of the Messenger:** Thren chooses Rals who keep their word—especially regarding promises of arrival and rescue times.

RED-EYED KYRION, THE BATTLE-BITER

Kyrion is the horse that scares other undead horses.

In life, he was bred for melee arenas and mercenary skirmishes: compact, muscular, trained to bite and kick as his rider hacked from the saddle. He died in a riot when peasants stormed the lists; he was found later, jaws locked around a rebel's arm even in death.

In undeath, Kyrion's eyes glow faintly red, his teeth slightly too long. His ears are torn; his hindleg bears a deep groove where shrapnel once carved bone. He has a habit of chewing on wood, armor straps, and sometimes the edges of shields.

Red-Eyed Kyrion — Stat Template

Type: Undead War-Horse (Aggressive Charger)
Role: Shock cavalry, melee harassment

Attributes:

- MGT: 80
- GRC: 60
- END: 80
- AWR: 55
- PRE: 55

Wounds: 5
Armor Rating (AR): 2 (bone ridges and spiked barding)
Move: 11

Primary Attacks:

- **Savage Bite:** 60% to hit, 1d8+1; on a Critical, Hard Endurance Test or bleeding effect.
- **Hoof Strike:** 55% to hit, 1d8

Skills:

- Athletics 60%
- Morale/Discipline 60%
- Awareness 40%

Traits:

- **Undead**
- **Battle Frenzy:** When Kyrion or his rider scores a Critical hit in melee, Kyrion gains +10% to his next Attack this combat.
- **Ripper Instinct:** Advantage on Attacks against prone or fleeing enemies.

Bond Scaling (Kyrion)

- **Bond 1:** As statted.
- **Bond 2 – Blood-Shared:** +10% Morale/Discipline; Ral senses whether Kyrion is calm, agitated, or "hungry for a fight."
- **Bond 3 – Sharpened Fury:** +10% Attack & Athletics; plus one improvement; +10% Attack vs targets already wounded this combat.
- **Bond 4 – Fearless Predator:** Immune to fear; once per scene, ignore intimidation penalties from monstrous foes for a round.
- **Bond 5 – Red Tempest (Mount Boon):** Once per combat, Kyrion enters a controlled frenzy for one round:
  - +20% to all Attack rolls with Bite/Hoof.
  - –10% to Defense as he overcommits.
  - Any enemy he wounds that round must pass Morale/Resolve or suffer –10% to further attacks vs him and rider from fear.

Earning Red-Eyed Kyrion

Possible arcs:

- **The Arena of the Dead:** The Ral infiltrates a Choir-sponsored blood-sport where undead mounts and riders slaughter captives; freeing Kyrion from a cruel master cements their bond.
- **The Riot Remembered:** The Ral protects a mob from unjust slaughter, showing Kyrion they use violence against those who deserve it—tyrants, not peasants.
- **Oath of Directed Savagery:** Kyrion chooses those who agree to **channel his aggression** only at legitimate enemies of the Order.

GHOST-BARDED SEREL, THE PALL RIDER

Serel is a rumor in the stables until you see him.

His barding is a patchwork of faded cloth and bone plates that flicker at the edge of vision. Sometimes, looking directly at him, you see nothing but a pale, thin horse; from the corner of your eye, he is huge, looming,

and closer than seems possible. His hooves leave soft prints in dust but almost no sound.

Birdsong stops when Serel passes. Dogs whine and back away. The living sense him before they see him, and most look away quickly.

Ghost-Barded Serel — Stat Template

Type: Undead War-Horse (Spectral Courser)
Role: Stealth approach, fear support, terror mount

Attributes:

- MGT: 75
- GRC: 65
- END: 75
- AWR: 60
- PRE: 60

Wounds: 5
Armor Rating (AR): 2 (ethereal bone plating and light barding)
Move: 12

Primary Attacks:

- **Hoof Strike:** 50% to hit, 1d8
- **Phantom Lunge (special):** 45% to hit, 1d8; if declared as an "intangible strike," missed reactive attacks against Serel do not connect that round (per your combat rules).

Skills:

- Athletics 55%
- Stealth 55%
- Awareness 45%
- Morale/Discipline 60%

Traits:

- **Undead**
- **Half-Unseen:** When stationary or moving slowly, enemies suffer –10% to Awareness to spot him, especially in low light or mist.
- **Aura of Unease:** First time a living creature clearly notices Serel within 3 meters, they must make a simple Resolve Test; on failure, they are Shaken for 1 round (–10% to social/combat actions).

Bond Scaling (Serel)

- **Bond 1:** As statted.
- **Bond 2 – Shared Stillness:** +10% Morale/Discipline; Ral senses direction and a faint "emotional temperature" (peaceful/tense/hostile) of his surroundings.
- **Bond 3 – Thinning Veil:** +10% Attack & Athletics; plus one improvement; +10% Stealth in fog, smoke, or dim light.
- **Bond 4 – Fearless Shade:** Immune to fear; once per scene, move through crowds/alleys/cramped spaces as partially incorporeal, ignoring difficult terrain/squeezing penalties for one Move.
- **Bond 5 – Pall of Silence (Mount Boon):** Once per scene, Serel and rider create a 5–10 m **Pall of Silence** for one round:
  - Sounds are heavily muffled; speech becomes whisper-thick.
  - Enemies inside suffer –20% Morale/Resolve and –10% Awareness.
  - Ranged attacks from outside targeting them suffer –10%.

Earning Ghost-Barded Serel

Hooks:

- **The Silent Procession:** The Ral escorts a group of doomed prisoners or plague victims to their fates, treating them with dignity instead of

cruelty. Serel appears at the end of the road, as if to accompany one who understands quiet endings.

- **The Hushed Chapel:** In an abandoned roadside chapel where no one dares speak above a whisper, the Ral keeps a silent vigil through the night. At dawn, Serel is waiting outside.
- **Oath of Quiet Work:** Serel bonds with Rals who accept that not all heroism is loud—those who will do grim tasks without banners or applause.

Using Mounts in Play

In **The Order of Ral**, the mount is not gear. It is not a hit point buffer. It is:

- The Protagonist's **primary Companion**.
- A mirror of the Ral's choices (cowardice, cruelty, compassion).
- A carrier of story arcs: lost fortresses, broken roads, ruined tournaments.

Mechanically:

- Treat mounts as **fully statted Companions** that can act, suffer, and grow.
- Use **Grave Bond** as your dial for how much they anticipate the Ral and how far they will go for them.
- Lean on unique **Mount Boons** at Bond 5 to define the Ral's style of cavalry play—line breaker, night stalker, wall, courier, predator, or terror rider.

Narratively, the day a Ral's mount succumbs to **Quietus** is often remembered as harshly as the death of a fellow knight. Some Rals have been broken more by the loss of their horse than by the loss of their own face in the mirror.

The Order rides on bone and will. When the last living kingdoms fall, it may be just hooves on stone, echoing in the dead streets, as Ral and mount make one final charge against the Grave Star's choir.

If you want to go further, we can next:

- Add a **Grave Bond advancement procedure** (how/when Bond ticks up, examples of triggers), or
- Write a short **Chapterhouse Stables** sidebar with sample NPC bone-smiths, stable hands, and minor drama around mounts.

Increasing the Grave Bond

A Ral does not simply "buy" loyalty from their mount.

The Grave Bond is not a number on a character sheet first and a relationship second. It is the accumulation of **rides survived**, **choices made**, and **how the Ral treats the thing that carries them into hell and back**.

Mechanically, Bond 1–5 is a simple rating. In fiction, it is the answer to a harder question:

> "If everything else fails, does this mount still try to stand between you and the world?"

This section explains **how Protagonists increase Grave Bond with their war-horse** and how the Director can track and adjudicate that growth using the same logic as One-on-One's advancement and Clocks.

Starting Bond

By default:

- A newly created Ral begins with their mount at **Bond 2 (Standard Start)**, representing a functional, bound Companion and a few campaigns' worth of service.

- The Director may choose **Bond 1** for very new or freshly bound mounts, or **Bond 3** for veteran Rals with a long-shared history as part of a higher-tier campaign start.

Ask one question at creation:

- "Is this a **new partnership under pressure**, or an **old partnership nearing its breaking point**?"

The answer sets the starting Bond.

The Bond Track: How You Actually Advance

Instead of treating Bond as a spendable point purchase, *the Order of Ral* uses **Bond Milestones**:

- Each mount has a simple **Bond Track**: a list (or Clock) of **meaningful joint experiences**.
- When enough Milestones are met for the current tier, Bond can increase by **+1** during downtime, a sanctum stay, or a stable-rite scene.

You do not roll to increase Bond. You **earn** it.

Recommended Structure

For each step up (e.g., Bond 2 → 3, Bond 3 → 4), the Director looks for **3–4 clear Milestones**, drawn from three broad categories:

1. **Shared Trial** – real danger survived together.
2. **Care & Regard** – the Ral treats the mount as more than equipment.
3. **Choice at Cost** – the Ral sacrifices something for their Companion (or vice versa).

Once the Director is satisfied that all three categories have been hit at least once since the last Bond increase (and ideally multiple times), they can:

- Declare that the **Bond can advance at the next appropriate moment**:
    - A Chapterhouse rest,
    - A stables scene with bone-smiths,
    - A quiet roadside encampment with ritual.

You can formalize this as a **4-segment "Bond Clock"** per tier if you like, ticking one or more segments when a qualifying event happens.

Bond Milestones: What Counts?

Below are examples of what counts as milestones for each category.

1. Shared Trials

These are the rides and battles where the Ral and mount both **face real risk together**:

- The mount **tanks blows or incoming arrows** while the Ral fights from the saddle.
- The pair rides through **concentrated enemy fire** or a packed undead horde and somehow emerge intact.
- They share a **running retreat**, covering allies' escape at serious personal risk.
- The mount is badly wounded (or nearly destroyed) and survives due to the Ral's efforts.

For each such event, the Director notes:

> "These two took a beating together and did not break."

When a Ral repeatedly lives or dies based on the mount's footing, that's a Shared Trial.

2. Care & Regard

This is where the Protagonist shows that the mount is not just a tool:

- The Ral spends downtime **cleaning, repairing, and honoring** the mount's barding and bones.
- They **refuse to trade** their mount for a "better" one, even under pressure from superiors.

- They take on **minor burdens** to make life easier on the mount:
    - Walking instead of riding when the mount is damaged.
    - Appointing a smith or squire to keep its tack and barding in good order.
- They show **public respect**: speaking softly to the horse, rejecting mockery from others who call it an abomination.

Mechanically, this often overlaps with **downtime scenes and resource spend**:

- Using Wealth or Assets to upgrade barding or shoes.
- Choosing Stronghold improvements that benefit the stables.
- Declaring that the first thing the Ral does after a mission is "see to my horse."

When such acts happen consistently, mark a Care & Regard Milestone.

3. Choice at Cost

These are the moments where Bond deepens because someone pays a price:

- The Ral chooses to **pull back** from a killing blow to avoid overcommitting Kyrion, or risks personal damage to spare their mount.
- The Ral **refuses an easy escape** that would leave the mount trapped or surrounded.
- The Ral spends scarce resources (Essence, Wealth, or a rare Favor) on **saving or repairing** the mount instead of on their own upgrades.
- The mount, under Director control, knowingly **takes a hit meant for the Ral or an ally**, stepping into danger beyond normal orders.

Choice at Cost is the strongest Bond driver; it should feel significant. It's also where you can visibly show:

- If the Ral treats the mount as expendable, Bond **stalls** or even drops.
- If they treat it as a comrade in arms, Bond advances.

Procedure: From Bond 2 to Bond 3 (Example)

Imagine a Ral with Ash-Mare Lethra at Bond 2.

Over a short campaign arc:

1. **Shared Trial:**
    - They ride through a necrotic mist to flank Choir crossbowmen. Lethra takes several hits, but the pair breaks the line, tipping the fight.
2. **Care & Regard:**
    - After the mission, the Ral spends hard-won coin and time to have a bone-smith **rework Lethra's barding for silence**, and refuses a superior's suggestion to swap her for a "sturdier" mount.
3. **Choice at Cost:**
    - In a crumbling city, the Ral has to choose between sprinting for the last intact bridge alone, or slowing to shepherd civilians onto carts that Lethra pulls across under fire. They choose the latter, taking extra wounds in the process.

The Director has now seen all three categories hit at least once in a meaningful way. At the next stable-rite or Chapterhouse rest, the Director can say:

> "Mark a Bond increase with Lethra: you're now Bond 3. Choose your improvement (Vitality/Skill/AR) and apply the Bond 3 bonuses."

Ritualizing the Increase

Bond increases should be **felt in the fiction**, not just noted on the sheet.

When Bond goes up, give it a **stable scene** or **roadside rite**:

- The bone-smith paints a new sigil on the mount's breastplate.
- The Ral recites the ride's worst moments aloud, hand resting on the horse's skull.
- The mount responds—nudging, bowing, or snorting in a way that feels almost conversational.
- For named mounts, this may come with **a brief vision**:
    - Varos shows the Ral a glimpse of one of his old sieges.
    - Serel reveals a silent procession of figures they both failed to save.

Mechanically, you finalize:

- The Bond rating.
- Any Bond-based bonuses (Attack/Athletics, Morale bump, AR/Vitality tweaks).
- The progression toward Bond 5 and the Mount Boon.

Can Bond Decrease?

Yes—and it should, if the fiction demands.

Bond can **drop by 1** when:

- The Ral **betrays** the mount's trust in a significant way:
    - Abandoning it to save themselves without overwhelming justification.
    - Deliberately risking it in a pointless show of bravado.
- The Ral **habitually mistreats** the mount: beating, neglect, or treating it purely as expendable equipment in front of others.
- Sorcery or Corruption-driven acts cause the mount to **recoil**, especially mounts like Ghost-Barded Serel who are sensitive to spiritual tone.

Mechanically, reduce Bond and remove associated benefits:

- You can frame this as a Clock in reverse: when a "Betrayal/Neglect" Clock fills, Bond steps down.

If Bond ever falls to **0** (rare, and should be dramatic):

- The Grave Bond is broken.
- The mount will no longer accept orders except in the most generic way, and may be reclaimed by the Order or allowed to fall into Quietus.

New Mounts and Inherited Bonds

When a mount suffers **Quietus**, a Ral must bind a new Companion.

Rules of thumb:

- A new mount bound after Quietus typically starts at **Bond 1 or 2**, even if the old mount was Bond 4–5.
- If the Ral honors the fallen mount (graveside rites, barding preserved, stronghold memorial), the Director may allow **+1 starting Bond** on the new pairing to reflect emotional openness and experience.
- Named Companions (Varos, Lethra, etc.) may **refuse to leave the stables** for Rals whose previous mounts died from clear betrayal or neglect.

Inherited mounts—those passed from a Quietus-fallen Ral—are special:

- The inheriting Ral does **not** gain the old Bond rating.
- They may start at Bond 2, but the mount's memories and expectations are heavier.
- Milestones for such mounts often lean hard into **Choice at Cost**: proving you are worthy of their prior knight.

Director Guidance: Pacing Bond Advancement

If you frame Bond as **another advancement track**, you can control pacing roughly like this:

- **Short Arc (6–8 sessions):**
    - 1 Bond increase, maybe 2 if mount is heavily spotlighted.
- **Long Arc / Campaign:**
    - A Ral might realistically go from Bond 2 → 4 over the course of a full-volume story.
    - Bond 5 and the Mount Boon should feel like a **major campaign milestone**—a tangible sign that Ral and mount have been through a great deal together.

As a rule of thumb:

- Do not increase Bond **more than once between major downtime/Stronghold phases**.
- Treat Bond 5 as equivalent to unlocking a **signature Destiny-level feature** in the relationship.

Chapter 9: Corruption & Humanity

The Pull of the Grave Star

Ral Parthanus used to tell new knights:

> "You did not *escape* the grave. You are just farther from it than most. The Grave Star is patient."

In the world of the Order, the sky is not neutral.
Far above the wars of kingdoms and the prayers of the living burns an unseen point of pressure the Rals call **the Grave Star**—Athrakar, the devourer, the stone hung in the dark behind all other lights. Every corpse, every dying breath, every surrender of hope nudges the world closer to that star's gravity.

Corruption is the measure of how strongly that gravity grips a soul.

For mortals, Corruption is a stain, a bruise of the spirit that shows in the eyes and in the choices they make. For the Ral death-knights, it is more than that: it is **the angle of their orbit** between what they once were and what Athrakar wants them to become.

They are already dead.
They ride on undead horses.
Their Boons are carved into bone and Essence.

Even so, a Ral can be:

- **Largely human in instinct**, bearing guilt and pity, or
- **Half star-stone already**, cold and efficient, or
- **A weapon on the very edge of becoming an enemy to all life.**

This chapter explains what Corruption is, how it behaves under the Grave Star, and how it is tracked and used in play.

What Corruption Is (and Is Not)

Corruption is **alignment to Athrakar**, not a morality meter and not simply "being evil."

A Ral can commit dreadful acts out of duty or necessity and remain relatively low in Corruption if:

- They are **forced** into those acts by circumstance,
- They fight to preserve others rather than themselves,
- They refuse to take pleasure in horror,
- Their inner stance remains *against* the Grave Star's pull.

Conversely, Corruption can rise even when no blade is drawn:

- A whispered bargain with a Choir priest.
- A moment of deliberate cruelty, with no tactical reason.

- A choice to **enjoy** what Athrakar enjoys: the unmaking of bonds.

Mechanically, Corruption is a **1–100 track**.
Fictionally, it's the answer to a simple question:

> "If the Ral died again tonight, which direction would their Essence fall?"

The world notices.
Clergy can feel it.
Animals smell it.
Other Rals recognize it in how a comrade rides, how they speak, and what they refuse to look at.

The Grave Star's Pressure

Athrakar is not a god in the human sense. It does not argue, promise, or explain.

It **pulls**.

- It pulls on the souls of the newly dead.
- It pulls on the Choir's rites and their demon-god's ascent.
- It pulls on every Ral who chooses to remain in motion rather than lie still.

Every act of Sorcery is a brief, conscious **lean toward** that gravity.
Every act of deliberate cruelty or betrayal is a **gesture of consent**.

The Order's theologians and Scholars do not agree on whether the Grave Star has intent. What they agree on is this:

- **High Corruption Rals do not think the same way anymore.**
- They may still fight on the "right" side, but their **reasons** have shifted.
- At the extreme, they are little more than **Choir weaponry** that has not yet realized it has changed sides.

The Grave Star does not move.
You move toward it—or you do not.

The Corruption Track

For this module, Corruption is tracked on a **1–100 scale**, divided into broad bands:

- **0–29 – Mostly Human**
- **30–59 – Touched by the Grave**
- **60–79 – Hollowed**
- **80–100 – Star-Lost**

Rals rarely, if ever, reach true 0. They died once already; the Rite and their Boons are permanent scars. Most newly created Rals begin play somewhere in the **10–25** range—still recognizably themselves, but aware of a cold center where their heartbeat used to be.

Corruption goes **up** when:

- You wield Sorcery and fail to contain its aftertaste.
- You participate knowingly in Choir rites or atrocities.
- You choose, persistently, to act in ways that delight Athrakar.

Corruption goes **down** slowly, if at all, when:

- You submit to Faith rites and penances.
- You undertake acts of genuine mercy and sacrifice with no gain.
- You deliberately turn away from choices that would make you more efficient but less human.

The Director decides when Corruption shifts, but the **track is visible** to the Protagonist. It is not a secret meter; it is a pressure the Ral feels in their bones.

Bands of Corruption (Fiction First)

0–29: Mostly Human

At this stage, the Ral is recognizably the person they were before the Rite—if colder, quieter, and scarred in ways the living cannot fully understand.

Signs:

- Their humor, if they have any, is still theirs.
- They still care about individual lives, not just "acceptable losses."
- They may hesitate before a slaughter, argue with superiors, or refuse certain orders.
- Their voice still cracks when they speak of the dead they failed.

In the world:

- Children may fear them at first, but some will approach, especially if they show gentleness.
- Clergy feel a **wrongness**, but many can still reconcile it with doctrine: "They are cursed, but they serve."
- Animals are wary but can be calmed with skill and patience.

In play:

- Faith casters can still work easily **in their presence**.
- Their Oath Boons function normally; saints and vows have not given up on them.
- Sorcery, if used, leaves a bitter taste—but it isn't yet a dominant flavor.

30–59: Touched by the Grave

Here, the Grave Star's pull is no longer a background hum. It is a quiet, constant pressure.

The Ral may still make "good" choices, but **those choices start to cost more**: anger, exhaustion, or numbness.

Signs:

- Their laughter is rare and often hollow.
- They watch crowds and comrades with a distant appraisal: "Who can be spared?"
- They may find it easier to kill, but still feel the weight afterward.
- Dreams (if they have them) are colder—stone halls, dead skies, empty cities.

In the world:

- Most animals will not approach without significant handling.
- Sensitive mortals (children, mystics, some Faithful) feel an instinctive chill around them.
- Rumors begin: "That one is more dead than the others."

In play:

- Minor penalties may begin to appear when working closely with certain Faith rites; some clergy are unsettled.
- Certain Grave Boons may awaken or strengthen at this tier.
- Sorcery **fits** more easily; resisting its temptations starts to feel like swimming against current.

60–79: Hollowed

This is the realm of knights the Order quietly watches.

Hollowed Rals can still be heroes. They may be the ones who throw themselves into the worst warzones, who volunteer for suicide missions and refuse to die. But their **inner map** has changed.

They think in terms of **necessary sacrifices**, not lives.

Signs:

- They speak of villages and regiments like pieces on a board, even when they mean well.
- Acts of kindness are deliberate, almost ritualized—performed because they know they ought to, not because they feel it easily.
- They may stare too long at mass graves or Choir altars, not with horror, but with interest.
- They rarely dream of the past; when they rest, they feel the Grave Star like a weight on their chest.

In the world:

- Many clergy refuse to let them near relics or sanctums without supervision.
- Mortal followers may love them as war-heroes and still fear their judgment.
- The Choir may actively **whisper** to them in battle, offering cleaner paths to victory if they will just let something go.

In play:

- Faith spellcasting in their immediate presence may suffer small penalties (Director's call).
- Oath Boons that rely on compassion or restraint may **waver** or become conditional.
- Some Grave Boons grow more powerful—at the cost of social and spiritual distance.
- Sorcery becomes dangerously "easy": it works when called, and Presence Tests grow harder as the knight leans into efficiency over restraint.

80–100: Star-Lost

Beyond 80 Corruption, the Ral is **barely orbiting** anything but Athrakar.

They may still fight the Choir.
They may still guard walls and hold the line.

But their reasons are their own, and those reasons often rhyme with annihilation.

Signs:

- They show little to no visible remorse for anything that "needed" doing.
- They treat civilians and comrades alike as temporary arrangements.
- Their presence unnerves even other Rals; conversations with them feel like speaking to a cliff-face.
- When they pray, they do not expect anyone but the Grave Star to answer.

In the world:

- Clergy may try to bar them from holy sites outright. Some will attempt exorcism or execution.
- Animals will not willingly approach. Even undead mounts strain at their reins.
- Choir agents may attempt to recruit them, seeing a weapon that is already half theirs.

In play:

- Faith-based abilities and Oath Boons may **fail** entirely, or twist.
- The Director is encouraged to introduce **compulsions, visions, or offers** from Athrakar and the Choir.
- Sorcery Presence Tests are brutally difficult; gaining Corruption becomes almost automatic.
- At or near 100 Corruption, the Ral is on the brink of one of two fates:
    - **Quietus** – final unmaking; the Grave Star claims what is left.

- **Turned Weapon** – they become an NPC under Director control, a Choir-aligned champion or star-touched monstrosity.

Gaining Corruption

Corruption should **matter**. It rises when the Ral steps closer to Athrakar, whether through magick, atrocity, or deliberate bargains.

The following are **guidelines**, not a rigid accounting ledger. The Director decides when and how much Corruption is gained, leaning on fiction first and numbers second.

Sorcery Use

Every use of Sorcery is a conscious decision to put your hand on the Grave Star's chain.

Mechanically:

1. The Ral spends Essence and rolls their **Sorcery** (or relevant casting Skill) to attempt the effect.
2. Regardless of success or failure, they must make a **Presence (PRE) Test** with a negative modifier based on the spell's power.
3. **On a failed Presence Test**, they gain Corruption.

Suggested Presence modifiers and Corruption gains:

- **Cantrip-level Sorcery** (small, quality-of-life workings)
    - Presence Test: **PRE –10**
    - On failure: **+1 Corruption**
- **Lesser Sorcery** (combat-scale effects, minor curses, modest utilities)
    - Presence Test: **PRE –20**
    - On failure: **+1d3 Corruption** (Director may fix at +2)
- **Greater Sorcery** (scene-changing, battlefield-shaping, major curses)
    - Presence Test: **PRE –30**
    - On failure: **+1d4 or +1d6 Corruption** (Director sets per spell)
- **Ritual Sorcery** (long workings, multi-caster rites, major miracles of unlife)
    - Presence Test: **PRE –30 or worse**, possibly with Disadvantage
    - On failure: **+1d6+2 or more Corruption**

Presence Tests represent the Ral's **inner refusal** to let Athrakar's pull linger. At higher Corruption degrees, the Director is free to apply **additional penalties** to these Tests, reflecting that the Ral is already too far gone.

Choir Rites and Atrocities

You gain Corruption when you:

- **Assist in Choir rites**, even under coercion—chanting, carrying offerings, holding victims down.
- **Allow atrocities** to proceed when you could clearly intervene, especially for advantage.
- **Desecrate holy sites** deliberately, not under tactical necessity.
- **Feed** off the Essence of the dying (if such options exist in your version of the module).

Guidelines:

- Minor complicity or forced presence without consent: **+1 Corruption** (or none, if resistance and revulsion are clear and significant).
- Willing, purposeful assistance in serious Choir rituals or massacres: **+1d3 to +1d6 Corruption**.

- Designing or leading atrocities for strategic gain: **+1d6+2 or more Corruption**, and likely other consequences.

Deliberate Alignment to Athrakar

Some choices are so clearly in tune with the Grave Star that they override subtle accounting.

Examples:

- Murdering innocents solely to provoke fear or despair.
- Trading comrades' lives for convenience, not necessity.
- Destroying oaths (breaking sworn protections, sacred trusts) with no attempt at penance.
- Accepting explicit pacts offered by Choir entities: "Serve us, and your war will be easier."

These should always move Corruption **noticeably**: the Director might assign **flat +5, +10, or more** depending on severity and repetition.

Resisting and Reducing Corruption

Corruption is meant to be **hard to shed**. The Grave Star does not give back what it has taken lightly.

But the Order would not exist if no one ever pushed back.

If ever in doubt, a **PRE** or Faith skill roll can be used for most any applicable situation, if not otherwise stated.

In the Moment: Choosing Not To

The first line of resistance is **choice**.

When the Director presents an option that would obviously grant you power at the cost of your humanity, simply choosing differently may:

- Prevent Corruption gain outright, or
- Earn a small **reduction** (–1 or –2) if the temptation was severe and the cost real.

Examples:

- Refusing an easy Sorcery solution and instead taking a risky, mundane route.
- Sparing a Choir-tainted village and evacuating it instead of burning it.
- Turning down a Choir lieutenant's offer that would guarantee victory now but doom thousands later.

These decisions do not need a roll. The price is paid in risk and narrative complications.

Penance and Faith Rites

Between missions, a Ral can seek **structured penance**:

- Weeks of service in plague wards.
- Pilgrimage to old shrines and battlefields where they failed.
- Vigils over graves, reciting names of the fallen they could not save.

Mechanically, once per significant downtime, the Director may allow:

- A **Faith** or **Theology** Test (possibly modified by current Corruption).
- On success, a small reduction: **–1d3 Corruption**, or a flat **–2**.
- On a critical success, perhaps **–1d3–1** (never less than –1) and a narrative sign (a dream, a sign, a saint's silence instead of rejection).

Failure does not necessarily add Corruption, but it may mark that **the Ral's guilt is not yet properly faced**.

Acts of Mercy and Sacrifice

Some acts simply *pull* you away from Athrakar because of what they mean:

- Giving up a winning tactical position to save trapped civilians.
- Accepting certain personal Quietus to prevent mass casualties.
- Taking responsibility for Order crimes in public, knowing you will be hated.

These should be rare, dramatic moments. When they occur, the Director may award:

- **–3 to –10 Corruption**, depending on scale and sincerity.
- In some cases, an **Oath Boon might awaken or return** that had been suppressed.

Corruption reduction through sacrifice should feel **earned** and should reshape the story, not be used as a routine "cleanup" mechanic.

Corruption & Humanity – Mechanical Summary

Corruption Track

- **Range:** 1–100 (0 reserved for purely living mortals; most Rals start around 10–25).
- **Bands:**
    - **0–29 – Mostly Human**
    - **30–59 – Touched by the Grave**
    - **60–79 – Hollowed**
    - **80–100 – Star-Lost**

The exact starting value is set by the Director and player together based on backstory and how long the Ral has served.

Band Effects (Guidelines)

These are recommended default effects; the Director can tune them to taste.

0–29: Mostly Human

- No inherent mechanical penalties.
- Faith and Oath Boons function normally.
- Sorcery Presence Tests use the spell's listed modifier only.
- Social interactions:
    - **No automatic Disadvantage** with clergy or common folk beyond usual "undead knight" prejudice handled by roleplay.

30–59: Touched by the Grave

- Faith spells cast **in close proximity** to the Ral may suffer **–10** on casting Tests if the rite is particularly sensitive (Director's call).
- Certain Grave Boons that scale with Corruption may come online or gain small bonuses.
- Sorcery Presence Tests may suffer an additional **–10** penalty at the upper end of this band (e.g., 50+), reflecting growing alignment.
- Social:
    - Devout NPCs may sense unease; some Faithful may treat the Ral with suspicion or demand extra proofs of loyalty.

60–79: Hollowed

- Faith effects aimed **through** the Ral (blessings on them, relic uses, etc.) often carry **–10 or –20** to casting or may require extra ritual time.
- Oath Boons tied to mercy, restraint, or sanctity may:
    - Go dormant,

    - Or require explicit Director permission to function in specific scenes.
- Grave Boons may gain explicit upgrades (faster self-repair, enhanced undead senses), at the Director's discretion.
- Sorcery Presence Tests:
    - Apply an additional **–20** on top of normal spell modifiers.
- Social:
    - Most clergy distrust or fear the Ral; animals nearly always balk.
    - Intimidation may gain **+10** vs mortals who sense their aura; Persuasion may suffer **–10** in religious contexts.

80–100: Star-Lost

- Faith spells targeting or heavily involving the Ral are usually at **–20 or Disadvantage**, and some may simply fail—Director fiat.
- Oath Boons may:
    - Shut down,
    - Warp in theme (protecting only the Ral's warped idea of "duty"),
    - Or flip into something darker at the Director's option.
- Grave Boons are at their most potent, and custom star-tainted Boons may unlock.
- Sorcery Presence Tests:
    - Treat as **PRE –30 with Disadvantage** for all but the smallest workings—Corruption gain becomes nearly inevitable.
- At 100 Corruption:
    - The Ral either suffers **Quietus** (final death) or
    - Becomes an NPC under Director control as a Choir champion/star-touched horror.

Gaining Corruption (Mechanical Hooks)

Sorcery Use

- Every Sorcery spell requires a **Presence Test** after casting:
    - Cantrip: PRE –10, failure = +1 Corruption
    - Lesser: PRE –20, failure = +1d3 Corruption
    - Greater: PRE –30, failure = +1d4 or +1d6 Corruption
    - Ritual: PRE –30 or worse, often with Disadvantage, failure = +1d6+2 or more
- At higher Corruption bands (60+), apply an extra **–10/–20** to these Tests.

Choir Exposure & Atrocities

- Minor, reluctant exposure: +0–1 Corruption, depending on resistance.
- Willing assistance in rites: +1d3 to +1d6 Corruption.
- Planning or leading atrocities for gain: +1d6+2 or more.

Deliberate Alignment

- Explicit pacts with Choir entities, delighting in unnecessary cruelty, or repeated pattern of "power over people" choices:
    - Assign flat increases **(+5, +10)**.

Reducing Corruption

Choices in Play

- Refusing temptations and accepting risk may prevent gain or grant **–1/–2** Corruption.

Penance & Rites

- During downtime, a Faith or Theology Test after significant penance:
    - Success: **–1d3 Corruption** (minimum –1).
    - Critical success: possibly more, with an accompanying sign.

Major Mercy/Sacrifice

- Exceptional narrative acts (self-sacrifice, saving hundreds with no gain, bearing open shame for others' safety):
    - **–3 to –10 Corruption**, Director's discretion.

Corruption should move **slowly, but meaningfully**. A single adventure of casual decisions will not usually tip a knight from Mostly Human to Star-Lost—but a campaign's worth of convenience, shortcuts, and cold-blooded solutions most certainly can.

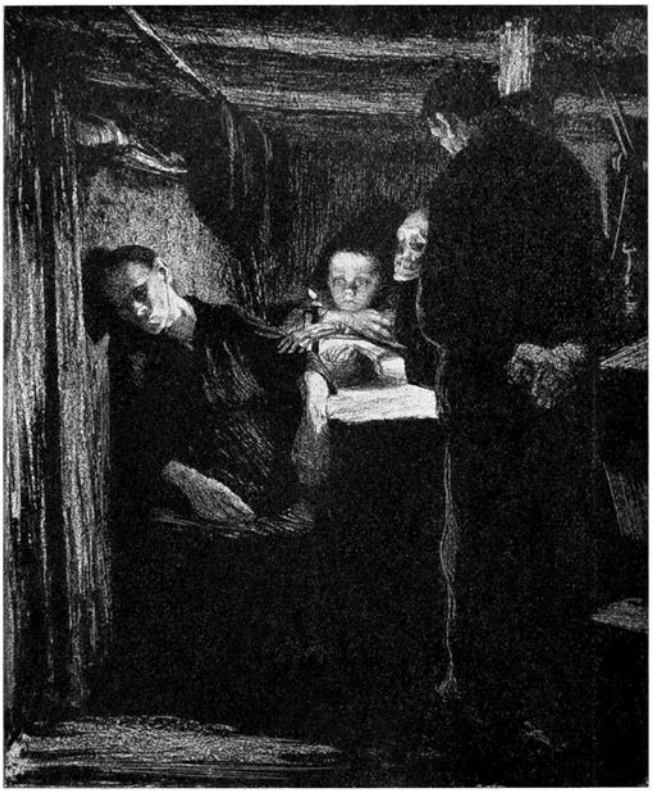
In summary:

- **Corruption is the measure of how much of the Ral still belongs to the living.**
- The Grave Star pulls; Sorcery, Choir rites, and cruel choices accelerate that pull.
- Faith, penance, and hard, costly mercy push back—never easily, never cheaply.

The Corruption track gives you a clear, mechanical backbone for that tension while keeping the focus firmly on the fiction: *what did you choose, and what is it doing to you?*

Chapter 10: Quietus

The Final End



Rals do not “die.” They do not go to sleep and fail to wake, or bleed out quietly on straw. A Ral’s body can be shattered, burned, scattered across a field and still something in it will try to stand. Quietus is not simple death; it is the moment when the Grave Star finally lets go… or claims you completely.

From the outside, it can look like anything: a shattered helm falling still in the mud, a knight on one knee who simply does not rise again, a set of empty plate harness and blackened bones that refuse every rite the Order knows. But to the Ral, Quietus is always the same shape: the end of will.

The ritual that made you Ral braided three things together—armor, corpse, and animus—and pinned them under Athrakar’s hateful light. As long as that animus clings, you are more difficult to erase than any mortal. Your heart can stop; your lungs are an old rumor; your blood is only an echo. You move because you *refuse* not to. You persist because someone made a bargain: your rest in exchange for one last war.

Quietus comes when that bargain can no longer be honored.

Sometimes it is brutally simple. A Horror’s limb falls like a cathedral and pulverizes armor, bone, and earth into one indistinguishable smear. A star-forged blade takes your head and most of your spine in a single screaming arc. A Choir rite tears your soul out of your body and nails it to an altar. In such moments, even the Grave Bond cannot find enough “Ral” left to inhabit; the animus frays like rotten rope, and the light that holds you stutters out.

Sometimes it is slower and worse. Corruption climbs the track, notch by notch, until there is more Grave Star in you than knight. Each compromise, each unclean working of Sorcery, each time you choose expedience over the last tatters of your old vows, another thread in the tapestry of your self-blackens. At the far end of that road, there comes a choice—if it can still be called that. One more act of cruelty, one more star-rite, one more step into Athrakar’s shadow… and either you vanish into the Choir as a high servant, or you throw yourself at some impossible purpose and burn out in the attempt.

Quietus can also be mercy.

The Order knows this. Buried deep in Chapterhouse liturgies and secret manuals are the rites for a willing Quietus: when a Ral’s existence has become unbearable to themselves or dangerously unstable to others. Perhaps Corruption has twisted their mind and they want the killing blow to be given by a friend rather than a Sinister. Perhaps their Grave Bond has been shredded by too many losses and they cannot bear the hollow ringing in their helm at night. Perhaps they simply feel that their work is done, that their last vow has truly been kept, and they no longer want to stand in the way of younger dead.

In such cases, the Order does not speak of "execution." They speak of **Rest**.

The rite is held in a sanctified place: a Chapterhouse crypt, a reclaimed chapel, a field where the Order once bought a village's survival with their own Quietus. Relics are set out, not to coerce, but to remember. Companions and surviving friends are invited if the Ral wishes it. Words are spoken—confessions, accusations, whispered thank-yous. Then, when the last unfinished business has been laid bare, the ritualist calls on whatever higher power they still believe in to cut the Grave Bond cleanly.

Some Rals meet Quietus roaring defiance at Athrakar, daring it to look them in the eyes as they finally fall. Others go to their end in exhausted silence, relieved beyond speech to have one moment where no one expects them to rise again. Either way, Quietus is the final punctuation mark on a story that was never supposed to last this long.

For Directors, Quietus is not a random trap. It should come at the end of arcs, at the culmination of clocks and consequences, when the table can feel that the Protagonist has walked the length of their path. For players, Quietus is the last choice about who their Ral really was: the terms on which they finally allow themselves to stop fighting.

No resurrection spell, no convenient "they were only mostly dead," should cheapen that. The world is full of corpses. A Ral who reaches Quietus has earned something rarer: an ending.

When to Call for a Quietus Test

Quietus Tests are rare. Only call one when the fiction clearly reaches *final* stakes.

A) Fatal Combat Result (Body Obliteration)
Call for a Quietus Test when:

- A combat outcome would mean **instant death for a mortal** (decapitation, total dismemberment, being reduced to ash, crushed beyond recognition), **or**
- The Protagonist is already at **Critical Wound** and suffers another clearly lethal hit, **or**
- A Horror/Sinister or relic explicitly states it can "destroy the body utterly."

In those moments, a mortal would simply die. A Ral instead gets one last chance to cling on.

B) Soul-Severing Effects (Rituals, Relics, Miracles)

Quietus Tests may also be triggered by:

- **Choir star-rites** that target the soul directly.
- **Holy / saintly miracles** intended to lay a Ral to rest.
- **Relics** that bind, sever, or judge undead animus.

These do not just break flesh; they cut at the animating will.

C) Maxed Corruption Pushed Further

When the Ral reaches the **highest band of the Corruption track** (80-100), any **further corrupting act or Sorcery use** may require a Quietus Test if it feels like a breaking point.

Examples:

- Calling on Athrakar's power to save only themselves.
- Deliberately sacrificing innocents for star-rites.
- Standing in the full gaze of a major holy presence while utterly tainted.

On a failure, the Ral may:

- **Slide fully into Athrakar's service** as an NPC (high servant, Horror's lieutenant), or
- Force their own Quietus through a final, self-chosen act (sacrifice, mutual destruction, etc.).

D) Ritual Quietus (Mercy End)

If the Order performs a **Ritual Quietus** at a sanctified site and the Ral **consents**, you often **don't need a Test**—this is a chosen end. If there is doubt, conflict, or interference (Choir, Politics):

- Treat it as a Soul-Severing Quietus Test, with bonuses for preparation and consent.

Directors: use this only when the player is clearly aiming for a curtain call.

The Quietus Test

A Quietus Test is a normal Test with **very high stakes**.

1. **Choose the base** (Director + player, guided by fiction):
    - Usually **Endurance (END)** – sheer refusal to release the bond.
    - Or **Presence (PRE)** – force of will and identity.
    - In soul-rites / holy confrontations, you may instead use **Faith** or **Theology**.
2. **Apply modifiers** via Advantage/Disadvantage as usual:
    - **+10 / +20** if:
        - In a sanctified Order site.
        - Companions are present, anchoring the Ral's identity.
        - A major Anchor is invoked (oath, loved one, vow).
    - **–10 / –20** if:
        - Damage is from **holy relics** meant to end undeath.
        - The scene is suffused with **Athrakar's power** (Choir node, star-rite focus).
        - Corruption is very high and the Ral has repeatedly chosen the Grave Star.
3. **Roll d100 ≤ Modified Skill Value (MSV).**

- **Win:**
  The Ral **resists full Quietus**. The body is still destroyed or broken as the scene demands, but the animus clings to what remains.
    - The Ral is physically gone from play **for now**, but:
        - Their **soul is not yet drawn away**.
        - With **great effort and powerful ritual** (campaign-level project, not a quick heal), they could be restored.
    - In the meantime, epilogue scenes, visions, or crypt-bound counsel may still be possible if you want them.
- **Lesser Win:**
  The Ral survives in a **maimed, diminished** state *or* in a way that costs dearly:
    - They might lose a limb, an eye, a Boon, or a key Anchor.
    - The Director may impose a lasting **Scar** (mechanical penalty, social brand, or trauma) instead of total end.
    - The body may be partially destroyed, requiring time and resources to function again.
      Use this only when you actively want to continue the story with a heavy price.

- **Loss:**
  Quietus.
    - The animating will is broken or severed.
    - The Ral is gone beyond recovery—no spell, no ritual can bring *that* Protagonist back.
    - The Director and player may frame an epilogue, last vision, or aftermath, but mechanically the character's story is complete.

Destiny & Quietus

Destiny is the only thing that can lean on Quietus without cheapening it.

- A Director may permit a Ral player to **spend Destiny** to:
    - **Re-roll** a failed Quietus Test, or
    - On a failed Quietus Test, **turn a would-be Quietus** into a Lesser Win outcome instead (permanent scar/maiming + severe narrative cost), if the Director agrees it fits.

Guidance:

- **Never** let Destiny erase the weight of Quietus casually.
- Destiny should **buy a different shape of ending**, not endless retries.

Chapter 11: Destiny

Destiny in *The Order of Ral* is not luck.

Luck is a cart that *happens* not to break a wheel. Luck is a crossbow bolt that *happens* to hit a shield instead of a throat. Destiny is something else: the moment when the world, for one breath, remembers why you rose from your grave in plate and iron and chooses not to look away.

The Grave Star has its own design for the world. Destiny is the thin, stubborn line that says: *not yet*.

What Destiny Is (and Is Not)

In this setting, **Destiny** is the one resource that still belongs more to the Ral's will than to Athrakar's gaze. Mechanically, it is exactly what the One-on-One core rules describe. The flavor around it here is different because **you are already dead** and still refusing to lie down.

Destiny is...

- **A limited resource** you can spend to tilt outcomes at crucial moments.
  Every point is a tangible push: the hand steadies on the hilt, the war-horse does not break stride, the Choir knight's killing stroke glances away for reasons no one will ever fully explain.
- **A player-facing tool** that protects agency and creates cinematic turns.
  It lets you say, "*This is not how I fall. Not here.*"
- **A statement of what the Protagonist truly cares about.**
  You do not spend Destiny on trivial coin or pride; you spend it when the Chapterhouse, your Companion, your mount, your humanity, or your oath is on the line.

Destiny is not...

- **A replacement for planning or Skill investment.**
  A Ral who rides blind into a Choir fortress with no plan will still be torn down, whether they have Destiny left or not.
- **A constant "always-on" bonus.**
  Destiny is not background static. It is a flare. If every roll is bent by it, none of them feel like fate.
- **An excuse to ignore consequences indefinitely.**
  You can spend Destiny to avoid *this* death, *this* corruption surge, *this* political disaster. You cannot spend it forever and expect the Grave Star not to notice you.

Destiny is best when it **changes a scene in a way everyone will remember**:
the impossible parry, the last gallop through a closing gate, the single word that stops a village from handing you over to the Choir.

Starting Destiny

Your **starting Destiny** is set by the **One-on-One RPG core rules**. *The Order of Ral* does **not** alter that number.

At character creation:

- Record your starting Destiny clearly on the sheet.
- Keep it **visible** next to your core stats; in duet play, Destiny is one of the Director's main pacing dials. A Ral with full Destiny behaves differently than a Ral who has burned it all just to stay in the saddle.

If you like a quick rule-of-thumb while building:
3 Destiny is a common, solid starting point in this module, but always defer to the actual core rules you're using.

How Destiny Works

Mechanically, use Destiny **exactly** as in the One-on-One core:

- You have a **pool of Destiny points**.
- When a roll truly matters, you may spend one or more points to **shift the numbers** before the outcome is finalized.
- Each point typically lets you:
    - **Boost your own side** (e.g., effectively +10 per point to your position), and/or
    - **Impair the opposition** (e.g., –10 per point to their effective position), as the core rules specify.

At the table, it often looks like:

- You see the roll.
- You feel how bad the failure would be—or how costly a partial success might become.
- You say, *"I spend Destiny,"* and adjust the math accordingly before the Director locks in the fiction.

Destiny interacts directly with:

- **Modified Skill Values (MSV)**: that +10/–10 per point can pull you back under your percentage or push them above theirs.
- **Degree of Success/Failure (DoS/DoF)**: even a small shift can flip a contest, change who gets **Edge** in combat, or turn a killing blow into a glancing one.

But the important thing for this setting is not the exact formula. It's **when** and **why** you reach for it.

When You Spend Destiny (In a World Like This)

You should feel Destiny like a physical weight in your gauntlet—a last coin you do not want to spend.

Spend it when the outcome is meaningful and you want to:

- **Avert a hard loss.**
  The Choir knight's strike rolled into Critical Wound territory. One point of Destiny shifts the contest; you take a Severe Wound instead and remain in the saddle.
- **Turn a loss into a Lesser Win.**
  Your attempt to drag villagers from a burning chapel *fails*—unless you lean on Destiny to claw it up to a narrow, messy success: some are saved, the Chapel burns, your shield arm is ruined.
- **Secure a clean success when a cost would be devastating.**
  You're leaping a narrow bridge with your undead war-horse; a pure failure means both of you fall into the contaminated river below. Destiny can be the moment the horse finds that last foothold.
- **Protect someone or something central to your Protagonist's anchors.**
  A Companion is about to be taken by ghouls, or the Chapterhouse gate will fall if this defense roll goes badly. That is Destiny territory.

In other words:

> **Spend Destiny when the *story* is at stake, not when your pride is at stake.**

Missing a stray ghoul in a field? Let the roll stand. Whether the Choir gets the relic that powers their next node? That's where Destiny leans in.

What Spending Destiny *Feels* Like in Play

Destiny in *The Order of Ral* usually expresses itself in a few recognizable ways. None of these change the core mechanics—they're **ways to narrate what the numbers already did.**

Improving an Outcome

You've failed a crucial test or only barely scraped by.

- A failure becomes a **Lesser Win**:
  You don't stop the ritual, but you disrupt it enough that the undead rise half-mad and fragile rather than in perfect Choir formation.
- A shaky success becomes **clean**:
  Your war-horse clears the collapsing bridge without losing its barding or throwing you off.

Mechanically: a Destiny spend nudges MSV/DoS/DoF so that you land on the better side of the line.
Fictionally: we see the small, unforgettable detail—the sudden firmness in the Ral's voice, the mount's impossible surge, the way a Cantor's hymn catches in his throat.

Reducing the Cost or Consequence

Sometimes the roll succeeds, but the cost the Director is about to attach is brutal.

Destiny can turn:

- A **Critical Wound** into a **Severe** one.
- A captured Companion into a narrow escape.
- A collapsed Chapterhouse wall into "only" a breached outer curtain.

You still pay, but you **don't pay the thing that ends your campaign** on the spot.

Securing a Crucial Detail

You can spend Destiny to make sure something **that could plausibly be true** *is* true.

- You have the **right relic token** to earn this priest's audience.
- Your armor was **quietly blessed** weeks ago; it holds against this one Choir rite.
- You remember the **old siege tunnel** beneath this town's walls, because you fought here in your first life.

Don't use this to summon miracles out of nowhere. Use it to **ratify the most interesting version of events**.

Holding the Line

The Grave Star wants you broken inside long before Quietus.

Destiny can be spent to:

- Resist **coercion**, fear, despair, or Choir indoctrination.
- Stand firm in the face of **iron disruption** or reality-warp around nodes.
- Keep a crowd or Companion from turning on you at the worst possible moment.

Mechanically, that's just the same +10/–10 working on opposing rolls. Narratively, it's the moment someone looks into your empty eyes and still decides to believe you.

Declaring a Narrative Pivot

Once in a while, Destiny is the moment when a scene's entire direction changes.

- The Choir procession is about to move past a village you cannot save. You spend Destiny and realize the **bridge ahead collapsed last winter**; now the procession must take the road that leads straight across your ambush ground.
- A Stronghold Event roll would have drawn a brutal siege; Destiny instead twists it into a **political visit** that still holds danger, but of a different kind.

The important rule:

> **Destiny supports the story you are already in. It does not exist to bolt on unrelated miracles.**

Destiny and the Ral's War

For a mortal hero, Destiny is about survival and triumph.

For a Ral, Destiny is about **time**—how much longer you can oppose the Grave Star before Quietus takes you.

You might spend Destiny to:

- Make sure your **mount** survives to fight another day, even if you go down.
- Keep a **Companion** from losing faith in the Order, even if that means you take on more Corruption or political blame.
- Hold the **Chapterhouse** through one more winter, repairing walls that ought to fall.

Every point you spend is an answer to a question:

> *If I must choose what endures—my body, my allies, my home, or my soul—what do I protect first?*

Mechanically, Destiny is simple: a finite pool, spent to tilt rolls and consequences as per the One-on-One core rules.

In this setting, the meaning is sharper. The Ral is already dead. Destiny doesn't save their life; it decides **what their afterlife is** *for*—and what, if anything, still stands when their name is carved into stone and their mount stands alone in its stall, waiting for a rider who will never return.

Chapter 12: Armory & Arsenal of a Dying Age

Steel remembers what the world is trying to forget.

In the marches and dead parishes where the Choir walks, the first thing people notice about a Ral is not the absence of breath—it is the weight of iron and mail, the shape of a kite shield in silhouette, the wet whisper of a greatsword leaving a scabbard blackened by old oil and dried blood.

This is a world where **weapons and armor are not decoration**. A farmer's pitchfork is the difference between driving off a hungry ghoul and leaving a child's bones in a ditch. A boiled leather jack is the only thing between a conscript's ribs and an undead knight's lance. An alchemist's vial, corked and shaking in a trembling hand, might be the only fire a village will see all winter.

For the **Order of Ral**, equipment is liturgy in steel: grave-iron flails etched with prayers, flanged maces meant to break star-touched bone, shields scored with bite marks from things that should have stayed in the ground. Their armories are half fortress, half reliquary, stocked not just with blades, but with **oils, salves, smoke-pots, grave-iron chains, bone saws, censers, and lanterns** that burn with blessed fat.

For the **Choir of the Grave Star**, the arsenal is more surgical:
hooked blades optimized to harvest bone, whips and chains to drag the unwilling into rites, bells that kill quietly when rung in the right pattern.

This chapter presents:

- A **plentiful list of melee and ranged weapons**, from daggers and morningstars to war-flails and pitchforks.
- **Armor and shields** common to knights, militia, and the half-armed poor.
- **Knightly kit and field gear** suited to Rals, their Companions, and common foes.
- **Alchemical concoctions** and special equipment that interact with the setting's Skills (Alchemy, Herbalism, Medicine/Chirurgery, Faith, Sorcery, etc.).

Mechanically, items follow the familiar pattern:

> **Name — Linked Skill, [Tags], Damage, Range Band, Traits/Notes**

Armor uses:

> **Name — [Armor], DR X, penalties/traits**

These are **defaults**. The Director can always bend traits for specific relics, Choir-forged items, or masterwork pieces.

Melee Weapons

All weapons assume standard One-on-One handling:

- Roll **d100 vs your combat Skill** (Blades, Blunt Weapons, Polearms/Lances, Brawling, etc.).
- On a hit, roll damage, apply **Edge Damage Bonus**, reduce by **DR**, then convert to Wound tier.

Range bands (for melee):

- **Reach** – in arm's length / close combat.
- **Near** – e.g., a set spear braced against a charge.

Blades

Dagger — Blades, [Melee, Light], **1d4**, Reach, *Concealable; Off-Hand*
A short, narrow blade for throats and ribs. Common on every belt from peasant to prince.

- May be drawn as part of an action at Director's discretion.

- Easy to hide; +10 to Deception/Stealthcraft when concealing a weapon on your person.

Short Sword — Blades, [Melee], **1d6**, Reach, *Reliable*
Typical sidearm for militia and squires.

- Balanced for quick strikes in tight spaces; no penalties in cramped corridors.

Longsword — Blades, [Melee], **1d8**, Reach, *Versatile; Half-Sword*
The standard knightly blade. Can be used one- or two-handed.

- **Two-Handed Grip:** Director may grant **+10 to damage roll** or +10 to Blades for powerful thrusts.
- Half-sword techniques give +10 to attacks vs heavily armored targets when you risk opening your guard.

Greatsword — Blades, [Melee, Heavy], **1d12**, Reach, *Two-Hand; –10 in tight spaces*
A slab of steel meant to cut through men and horses alike.

- –10 to Blades in tight, cluttered interiors.
- On a high Edge (20+), Director may allow "cleaving" effects vs clustered lesser foes.

Falchion / Heavy Cutlass — Blades, [Melee], **1d8**, Reach, *Chop-Bent*
A single-edged, weight-forward blade favored by some mercenaries and Rals who prefer brutal cuts over elegant fencing.

- +10 to damage vs lightly armored or unarmored targets (Director's call).
- –10 to Blades vs plate-armored opponents compared to thrust-focused designs.

Blunt Weapons

Club — Blunt Weapons, [Melee, Improvised], **1d6**, Reach, *Common; –10 if poorly balanced*
Anything from a chair leg to a studded cudgel.

- Cheap and everywhere, but prone to breaking on critical failures.

Mace — Blunt Weapons, [Melee], **1d8**, Reach, *Armor Breaker (+10 vs heavy armor)*
A knight's solution to skulls inside greathelms.

- +10 to damage vs chain, scale, brigandine, and plate, reflecting better energy transfer.

Warhammer — Blunt Weapons, [Melee], **1d10**, Reach, *Armor Breaker; Loud*
Beaked or flanged, built to crush plate and shatter bone.

- On a high Edge (20+), Director may allow additional Wound tier bump vs armored foes.
- Strikes ring out; may tick **Alert** or **Pursuit** Clocks in confined areas.

Morningstar — Blunt Weapons, [Melee], **1d8**, Reach, *Spiked; Armor Punisher*
A spiked ball on a short haft, intended to bite through mail and padding.

- Treat as having **+10 damage vs mail and gambeson**; spikes can catch in shields on a lesser win.

Flail (Single-Hand) — Blunt Weapons, [Melee, Exotic], **1d8**, Reach, *Chain-Head; Shield Harrier*
Iron head on a chain. Tricky to master; devastating in skilled hands.

- When used by a trained wielder (Flail-related specialization approved by Director), attacker gains **+10 to attempts to bypass or hook shields**.
- On a fumble, risk self-entanglement (–20 next action or lose attack).

War-Flail (Two-Hand) — Blunt Weapons, [Melee, Heavy, Exotic], **1d10**, Reach, *Crowd Control; Wild Arc*
A brutal two-handed flail sometimes used by Rals against clustered undead.

- +10 vs multiple adjacent lesser foes (ghouls, shamblers) at Director's call.
- –10 to precise, single-target strikes in cramped environments.

Polearms & Farm-Converts

Spear — Polearms/Lances, [Melee, Reach], **1d8**, Near, *Set vs Charge (+20 when braced)*
Bread-and-butter infantry weapon and the base of many polearms.

- +20 vs mounted or charging enemies if braced and readied.
- Easy to improvise from strong wood and a knife with Crafting: Wood/Leather.

Halberd — Polearms/Lances, [Melee, Reach, Heavy], **1d10**, Near, *Hook/Trip*
A spear-axe-hook combo for battlefield control.

- +10 to trip, drag from saddle, or pull foes off balance.
- –10 in tight corridors or when fighting directly beside allies.

Glaive / Voulge — Polearms/Lances, [Melee, Reach], **1d10**, Near, *Sweeping Edge*
A long blade on a pole, good for sweeping attacks and reaching over a shield-line.

- Advantage when attacking from behind friendly ranks or over low cover.

Lance (Knightly) — Polearms/Lances, [Melee, Charge], **1d12**, Near, *Charge Only; Braced Impact*
Designed for mounted charges.

- Gains **+10 to damage** during a properly set mounted charge (high speed, straight lane, no obstacles).
- Useless on foot without improvisation; treat as unwieldy spear with –10.

Pitchfork / Improvised Fork — Polearms/Lances, [Melee, Reach, Improvised], **1d6**, Reach, *Peasant's Spear*
Three- or four-tined farm tool adapted for defense.

- +10 to attempts to **hold distance** vs ghouls, wolves, and shambling corpses at gates or doorways.
- –10 to damage vs armored foes.

Quarterstaff — Blunt Weapons or Polearms/Lances, [Melee], **1d6**, Reach, *Defensive (+10 to parry-style rulings)*
Ferruled staff of ash or oak. Monks, pilgrims, and some Companions favor it.

- Director may grant **+10 to defensive maneuvers** (deflecting blows, holding narrow passes).

Flexible & Special

Whip — Blunt Weapons, [Melee, Flexible], **1d4**, Reach, *Control; Pain, Not Killing*
Leather lash for animals and men.

- +10 to **Intimidation** in certain scenes;
- Used in combat, it's more about **disarming, tripping, or dragging** than dealing true harm.

Chain-Whip / Grave Chain — Blunt Weapons, [Melee, Exotic], **1d6**, Reach, *Entangling; Choir-Favored*
Weighted chain sometimes inscribed with star-sigils, used by Choir wardens and some Rals.

- +10 to attempts to **entangle limbs or weapons**; failure risks self-entanglement.

Censer-Flail — Blunt Weapons, [Melee, Exotic], **1d6**, Reach, *Smoke & Ash*
A weighty censer on a chain, used by some Rals and Church remnants in exorcisms and close combat.

- When filled and lit, can create a **small smoke haze**; Director may grant –10 to enemy Awareness in tight interiors while it swings and spills incense/ash.

Ranged Weapons

Range bands:

- **Close** – across a room.
- **Near** – across a street or courtyard.
- **Far** – across a field.
- **Extreme** – rare, specialized shots.

Bows & Slings

Shortbow — Archery, [Ranged], **1d6**, Near, *Quiet; –10 in rain/wind*
Hunting and skirmishing bow.

- Easier to use from horseback than a longbow (remove –20 penalty if trained).

Longbow — Archery, [Ranged], **1d8**, Far, *Powerful; Requires Space*
Tall, heavy-draw bow used by seasoned archers.

- –10 in cramped alleys or dense woods;
- +10 damage vs lightly armored targets at Near when fully drawn and braced.

Sling — Archery, [Ranged, Cheap], **1d4**, Near, *Ammo Common; –10 vs armored*
Simple cord and stone.

- Stones are everywhere; ammo almost never a concern.
- Effective for driving off animals, crows, and lightly armored cultists.

Crossbows

Light Crossbow — Archery, [Ranged], **1d8**, Far, *Reload (action); +10 vs armor at Close/Near*
Crank or lever-loaded bow on a stock.

- Easier to train peasants on;
- Particularly dangerous to plate at short distances.

Heavy Crossbow / Arbalest — Archery, [Ranged, Heavy], **1d10**, Far, *Slow Reload; Armor Punch*
Siege or wall-defense weapon, or prized tool for monster hunters.

- Reload may take several actions or assistance;
- +10 damage vs armored targets at Close/Near; capable of inflicting Severe Wounds on good hits.

Thrown Weapons

Thrown Axe / Hand Axe — Archery, [Ranged], **1d6**, Close, *Loud; Recoverable (Director's call)*
Favored by foresters, raiders, and some Rals.

- Can double as a melee weapon at no penalty.

Throwing Knife — Archery, [Ranged, Light], **1d4**, Close, *Concealable; Limited Punch*
Useful as a surprise tool, not a primary killer.

- +10 to hit if thrown from **true surprise** at Close, but reduced effect vs armor.

Javelin / Throwing Spear — Archery, [Ranged], **1d6**, Near, *Line-Breaker*
Short, balanced spear for casting.

- Often used before closing to melee;
- Can be used as a poor spear if needed (–10 in melee).

Armor & Shields

Armor in *The Order of Ral* uses **Damage Reduction (DR)** against incoming damage. More coverage and mass mean more protection but also more penalties.

Bodies

Padded / Gambeson — [Armor], **DR 1**, *No Stealth penalty; Cheap Warmth*
Quilted linen or wool. Common under other armor.

- Helps vs bruises, stray slashes, and cold nights.

Boiled Leather Jack — [Armor], **DR 2**, *–10 Stealth if creaky*
Hardened leather plates sewn into a coat.

- Common among poorer guards, brigands, and hunters who expect trouble.

Leather Armor (Layered) — [Armor], **DR 2**, *–10 Stealth; Flexible*
Layered hides and reinforced jerkin.

- Permits decent mobility;
- Offers minimal protection vs heavy weapons.

Chain Shirt — [Armor], **DR 3**, *–10 Stealth; Jingle*
Mail covering torso, often over gambeson.

- Good against cuts and some thrusts;
- Vulnerable to crushing blows.

Mail Hauberk (Full Chain) — [Armor], **DR 4**, *–20 Stealth; Weighty*
Long mail coat, sometimes with coif and mittens.

- Excellent coverage vs blades;
- Less effective vs maces and warhammers.

Scale Coat / Brigandine — [Armor], **DR 4**, *–20 Stealth; Bulky*
Metal scales or plates riveted inside cloth/leather.

- Common among better-funded guards and lesser knights.
- Hot, stiff, and noisy.

Partial Plate Harness — [Armor, Heavy], **DR 5**, *–20 Stealth; –10 Athletics*
Breastplate, pauldrons, greaves over chain and padding.

- Standard for many Rals and higher knights.
- Provides strong protection with somewhat manageable weight.

Full Plate Armor — [Armor, Heavy], **DR 6**, *–30 Stealth; –10 Athletics; Terrifying Presence (+10 Intimidation in court or battlefield)*
Fully articulated harness with closed helm.

- At Ral level, often etched with grave-iron rites and saint-scripts.
- In peasant eyes, indistinguishable from a walking tomb.

Helmets

Open Helmet (Kettle/Cap) — [Armor], **DR +1 (head)**, *Minimal Penalty*
Wide-brim or simple iron cap.

- Protection vs overhead blows;
- No real Awareness penalty.

Greathelm / Visored Helm — [Armor], **DR +2 (head)**, *–10 Awareness in narrow vision (Director's call)*
Cylindrical or enclosed helm.

- Superb head protection;
- Can limit peripheral vision and hearing during stealth and social scenes.

Shields

Shields use the **Shields** Skill and generally do not have a damage die unless you bash with them.

Buckler (Small Round Shield) — Shields, [Defense], —, —, *Parry; Bash 1d4*
Hand-strap shield for parrying and quick deflections.

- +10 to reactive block/parry rulings in duels.

Round Shield — Shields, [Defense], —, —, *Block; Bash 1d6*
Sturdy wooden or steel-rimmed disk.

- +10 vs missiles at Close/Near when braced;
- Good for forming loose shield-walls.

Kite Shield — Shields, [Defense], —, —, *Block; Bash 1d6; Cover +10 vs arrows when braced*
Long, tapered shield favored by mounted knights and footmen alike.

- Excellent leg and flank coverage on horseback;
- Can serve as mobile cover in narrow lanes.

Heater Shield — Shields, [Defense], —, —, *Block; Bash 1d6; Heraldry*
Later, more compact evolution of the kite.

- Allows +10 to **Etiquette** / **Command** / **Intimidation** in formal or battlefield negotiations when bearing known heraldry.

Adventuring & Knightly Gear

Gear slots into the fiction more than the math, but many items justify **+10/–10** position shifts for appropriate Skills.

General Field Gear

Backpack Kit — [Gear]
Bedroll, flint, needle/thread, basic utensils.

- Reduces "you simply don't have that basic thing" problems; Director may be kinder about improvised fixes.

Rope (50 ft) — [Gear]
Climbing, hauling, tying.

- +10 to **Athletics** when climbing or securing, if used sensibly.

Grappling Hook — [Gear]
Throws, catches, pulls.

- +10 for climbs on stone, fortifications, or timber structures;
- –10 in soft earth or rotten wood.

Torches (x3) — [Gear]
Light and smoke.

- Essential to drive off most beasts and some undead;
- Lighting them risks ticking **Alert**/Pursuit Clocks.

Lantern + Oil — [Gear]
More reliable light than torches, with directional focus.

- Less vulnerable to wind;
- Oil can be thrown or spilled (Director may treat as minor fire hazard or +10 to Alchemy fire uses).

Lockpicks (simple) — [Tool]
Required for most lock-based **Thievery** attempts.

- Breaks on critical failure or clumsy attempts.

Crowbar — [Tool]
Lever for doors, lids, bars.

- +10 to forced entry **Blunt Weapons** / **Athletics** rulings;
- Loud enough to attract attention indoors.

Field Rations (3 days) — [Supply]
Hard bread, smoked meat, dried fruit, grain.

- Prevents hunger penalties while supplies last.
- Spoils faster in wet climates or without care.

Waterskin — [Supply]
Holds water or thin ale.

- Vital in travel; running dry justifies END tests in harsh environments.

Healing & Craft

Healer's Kit — [Medical], Medicine/Chirurgery
Bandages, needle, thread, spirits, clamps.

- +10 to **stabilization** and infection-prevention rolls when time allows.

Herbal Pouch — [Medical], Herbalism
Dried herbs, poultices, teas for pain and fever.

- +10 when using **Herbalism** for treatment, especially during Camp/Hearth Rest.

Smith's Tools — [Craft], Crafting: Smithing
Hammers, tongs, files, small portable coals.

- Required for meaningful weapon/armor repairs;
- +10 when improving or assessing metalwork in a proper forge.

Leatherworking Kit — [Craft], Crafting: Wood/Leather
Awls, needles, cutting blades, scrap leather.

- +10 to repairs on straps, saddles, belts, improvised armor patches.

Knightly & Ral-Specific

Saddle & Barding Set (War-Horse) — [Mount Gear]
War saddle, girths, barding harness.

- Proper gear removes or reduces mounted Disadvantage in combat;
- Repairs may require Leatherworking and Smithing.
- **DR: 2** by default (equivalent to partial/brigandine-style barding over a padded caparison).
- **Light Barding:** DR 1 (leather/boiled leather, minimal penalties)
- **Standard War Barding (default):** DR 2
- **Heavy Plate Barding:** DR 3 (slower, more expensive, rarer; usually Chapterhouse-grade)

Grave-Iron Manacles — [Restraint]
Heavy shackles inscribed with anti-Choir prayers.

- +10 to efforts to **hold undead or sorcerous prisoners**;
- Some Choir rituals treat them as hostile wards.

Reliquary Token — [Mystic]
Fragment of saint, martyr, or fallen Ral, sealed in metal or glass.

- Once per session (Director's discretion), may justify a **+10 Faith** bonus in a key scene (ritual, exorcism, Courage test) if invoked sincerely.

Chapterhouse Seal Ring / Mark — [Social]
Proof of Ral sanction.

- +10 to **Command/Intimidation** when invoking the Order;
- Also paints a target on you in Choir-controlled lands.

Alchemy, Oils & Concoctions

These items connect to **Alchemy**, **Herbalism**, **Faith**, and **Sorcery** Skills. They are not "spells," but **bottled preparation and grim craft**.

Director decides **availability**, cost, and which require Chapterhouse facilities vs roadside effort.

Alchemist's Fire (Flask) — [Consumable], Alchemy, **2d6**, Close, *Burning; Dangerous in packs*
A thick, sticky incendiary that clings and burns.

- On hit: roll damage; may continue burning for 1–3 rounds, doing 1d4 each round unless extinguished.
- Mishandling or critical failure can splash the user or allies.

Smoke Pot — [Consumable], Alchemy/Thievery
Earthenware pot that vents thick, choking smoke.

- Creates a **–20 visibility zone** for 1–3 rounds;
- Helps Stealthcraft, hinders Archery, confuses undead with poor senses.

Grave-Salt Vial — [Consumable], Alchemy/Faith
Salt mixed with ashes from consecrated graves.

- Sprinkled across thresholds or graves, may grant **+10 Faith** to resisting minor undead or weak Choir rites at that site.

Star-Bitter Tonic — [Potion], Alchemy/Herbalism
A bitter draught used by some Rals, witch-hunters, and priests.

- Once per scene, can justify **+10 to Presence or Endurance tests** vs fear, nausea, or Choir shock effects.
- Overuse may cause tremors, insomnia (for mortals), and grim roleplay consequences.

Blood-Quiet Draught — [Potion], Alchemy
Thin, calming sedative for injured Companions and panicked villagers.

- +10 to **Healing/Medicine** when dealing with screaming or thrashing patients;
- Abuse can create addiction and social complications.

Plague-Smoke Phial — [Consumable], Alchemy (dangerous)
Weaponized incense that drives off basic vermin and ordinary beasts—but attracts things that like plague.

- +10 to efforts to **clear rats, insects** from a cellar;
- Director may treat it as a Complication magnet for Plague Wights, Plague-Deacons, and Choir scouts.

Oil of Blackened Mail — [Oil], Crafting: Smithing/Alchemy
A dark preservative oil used on Ral plate and mail.

- Applied after Sanctuary Rest, may justify +10 to **Armor maintenance checks**;
- Some variants include low-grade warding reagents that justify small Faith bonuses vs rust and star-taint on gear.

Numbroot Poultice — [Poultice], Herbalism
Crude numbing paste for wounds.

- Allows a wounded Companion or NPC to ignore **Light Wound penalties** for a short scene at the cost of –10 Awareness or Grace due to dulled senses.

Using This Arsenal in Play

Treat this chapter as a **toolbox**, not a shopping list to clear.

- **Rals** begin play already heavily armed and armored: plate (partial or full), knightly blades, lance options, shield, and war-horse kit. Their armory becomes richer as campaigns continue.
- **Villagers, brigands, and militia** will lean on simpler weapons: pitchforks, clubs, short swords, padded jacks, borrowed helms.
- **Choir forces** often use the same basic tools, but twisted: grave-chains, inscribed manacles, bells, censers that spread a different kind of smoke.

When in doubt, remember the tone:

This is not a world of endless magick items
and gleaming relic aisles.
Every piece of gear on the Ral's belt has
seen fire, blood, and burial earth.

Armor is heavy, blades are finite, and the
wrong broken strap at the wrong moment
can kill you more surely than any sermon
the Grave Star ever preached.

Chapter 13: Combat & Harm

Violence in the Broken Age is almost never clean.

It is close, ugly, and witnessed – by chapel stones, by graveyards, by the bare fields where the Choir has already walked. It happens in alleys and barnyards, in churchyards and on ruined walls. It leaves stains in places that remember.

The living still hope for "fair fights." The dead know better.

Ral death-knights are not champions of shining tourneys or parade-ground duels. They are weapons dragged out after too many other weapons have failed – built to stand in doorways, to break cult processions, to hold lines that should have collapsed an hour ago. The Choir of the Grave Star does not march for honor either; it fights through patterns, surprise, and the simple arithmetic of bodies and terror.

This chapter is a quick reference to run fights cleanly using the **core One-on-One engine** in *The Order of Ral*:

- d100 rolls vs **modified Skill values**,
- **Advantage/Disadvantage** based on fiction,
- **Destiny** to bend fate,
- and the existing **harm / wound handling**.

The rules are simple on the surface. The horror and weight come from how you use them.

Combat Core

Combat in *The Order of Ral* uses the standard One-on-One resolution flow:

1. **Choose an approach and relevant Skill**
    - weapon Skill (Blades, Blunt Weapons, Polearms/Lances, Archery),
    - Brawling, Athletics, Shields, Tactics, etc.
2. **Roll d100 vs modified Skill value**
    - Apply circumstantial ±10/±20 modifiers.
    - Apply Advantage/Disadvantage where the fiction demands it.
3. **Spend Destiny normally**
    - Use Destiny as in core rules: to avert catastrophe, turn Losses into Lesser Wins, or seize brutal openings.
4. **Resolve Win / Lesser Win / Loss with clear fictional positioning**
    - Who is on the ground?
    - Who is pushed back?

- Who is exposed, cornered, emboldened?

5. **Apply harm when the fiction supports a real hit**
    - When an exchange clearly lands as an attack, roll damage.
    - Reduce damage with armor DR as normal or via your Wound logic.

Director principle: Combat is a series of **meaningful exchanges**, not a map puzzle. Each exchange should move the situation toward decision: someone bleeding, someone cornered, someone breaking and running, a Clock ticking toward collapse.

If nothing has changed after a "round," something is wrong with the call—tighten the stakes.

The Combat Exchange

Treat each beat of combat as a small conversation with sharp edges. Use this structure for each exchange:

1. **Declare Intent**
   Be explicit about what the Protagonist is trying to achieve:
    - strike to harm or maim
    - disarm, shove, or trip
    - pin or grapple
    - break through a shield line
    - protect someone (Companion, villager, relic, gate)
    - intimidate, scatter, or rout
    - escape or disengage
2. **Set Positioning**
   Establish:
    - cover (pillars, overturned wagons, chapel pews, grave markers)
    - distance (Reach, Close, Near, Far, Extreme)
    - footing (mud, broken stone, blood-slick flags)
    - surprise and awareness
    - numbers and flanks
    - visibility (smoke, torchlight, rain, chapel gloom)
3. **Roll**
   The active party (often attacker) rolls **d100 vs modified Skill value**.
    - Check for Critical Hit or Miss
4. **Outcome**
    - **Win:**
        - You achieve your intent.
        - If attacking, apply damage (after DR).
        - If controlling (trip, shove, pin, protect), apply that control effect.
    - **Lesser Win:**
        - Both sides technically fail, but your Degree of Failure is better.
        - You achieve your intent, but pay a cost:
            - you take a hit,
            - lose ground,
            - drop gear,
            - advance a Clock (Pursuit, Collapse, Alarm, Choir Notice),

        - expose a Companion or asset.
    - **Loss:**
        - You fail.
        - Opponent gains advantage, lands harm, or forces a worse position.
        - Let the result bite: Rals are hard to kill, not immune to humiliation or tactical defeat.

5. **Determine Degree of Success / Failure (DoS/DoF)**
   Use Degree to color the fiction:
    - High DoS: vicious hits, shattered shields, enemies scattering.
    - Slight success: glancing blows, forced retreats, staggered but not broken foes.
    - High DoF: disastrous slips, weapon tangles, catastrophic reveals (Choir sigils, unseen undead).

Keep exchanges decisive. If an exchange doesn't change:

- who is safe,
- who is closer to Quietus,
- which Clock advances,

then push harder as Director. This is a game about ugly choices, not attrition by inches.

Range & Distance

Use simple range bands, described through the world's ruined places:

- **Reach:** grappling distance, knives, hand-axes, shield bashes; clinches in doorways, wrestling in chapel aisles.
- **Close:** across a room, crypt, tavern, or small yard; sword-to-sword, spear's full reach.
- **Near:** across a street, stable yard, small graveyard; bow and crossbow comfort range.
- **Far:** across a field, between low walls or from hilltop to road.
- **Extreme:** long shots over ruined walls, tower-to-field, cliff-to-cliff, or between ships.

Director cue: In villages, forests, ruined cloisters, and grave-soaked fields, true **Far** and **Extreme** positions are rarer than you think. Sightlines break quickly. Most serious fights collapse into **Close** and **Reach** as fear, terrain, and desperation drag people together.

Damage & DR

Weapons and armor work as in the One-on-One core. In *The Order of Ral*:

- Weapons list **damage dice**.
- Armor lists **Damage Reduction (DR)**.

Apply them as usual:

1. **On a clean hit (Win where the fiction supports real harm):**
    - Roll the weapon's damage.
    - Add a weapon damage die if attack was a Critical Hit
    - Add any **Edge Damage Bonus** from Degrees of Success, situational leverage, or specific Boons if applicable.
2. **Apply armor DR**
    - Subtract target's DR as normal,
    - or plug the result into your Wound / Harm tiers.
3. **Zeroed damage still matters**
    - If DR reduces damage to 0, the hit may still create:
        - bruises,
        - cracked straps,
        - dented plate,
        - knocked breath,
        - narrative tells (noise, sparks, broken relic casings).

Director note: Ral plate and Choir-forged harness are tough, but not inviolable. Use low-damage hits as opportunities to show armor failing over time, not as excuses for stalling the story.

Edge and Edge Damage Bonus Reference:

If attacker wins with success vs failure:
Edge = attacker DoS + defender DoF
If both succeed and attacker wins:
Edge = attacker DoS – defender DoS
If attacker wins by mutual failure (Lesser Win):
Default is **positional Lesser Win** (no damage).
If the Director allows damage, treat **Edge Damage Bonus as +0** (see below).

Edge Damage Bonus (added to Rolled Damage):

Edge **0–9: +0**
Edge **10–19: +2**
Edge **20–29: +4**
Edge **30+: +6**

Converting Damage Score to Wound Tier (Reduced by DR):

Damage Score **1–6: Light Wound**
Damage Score **7–12: Medium Wound**
Damage Score **13–18: Severe Wound**
Damage Score **19+: Critical Wound**

Wound Tier Effects:

Healthy: No wound penalties.

Light Wound: Disadvantage –10 to relevant physical actions; you're hurt but functional.

Medium Wound: Disadvantage –20 to relevant actions; you can still act, but every action costs—this is where the fight changes.

Severe Wound: Disadvantage –30 to relevant actions; survival/extraction become immediate concerns (retreat, Full Defense, desperate tactics).

Critical Wound: You are Down (incapacitated or barely functional). The Director enforces the scene's stakes—captured, bleeding out, dying, or otherwise removed from control unless immediate aid changes the outcome.

Wound Stacking Reference:

If a new wound tier is HIGHER than your current tier:
Set your current tier to the new tier
Reset Strain to 0
Example: You are Light, then take Medium → you are now Medium, Strain 0.

B) If the new wound tier is EQUAL to your current tier:
Escalate one tier (Light→Medium→Severe→Critical)
Reset Strain to 0
Example: You are Medium, then take another Medium → you become Severe, Strain 0.

C) If the new wound tier is LOWER than your current tier:
Increase Strain by 1
If Strain would become 2: reset Strain to 0 and escalate one tier

Critical Hits and Critical Misses

Any attribute/skill roll of 01-05 is a Critical Success/Hit

In combat, a Critical Hit inflicts an additional Die of the weapon's listed damage type

Any attribute/skill roll of 95-100 is a Critical Failure/Miss

A Critical Failure/Miss can have special detrimental effects for some skills; a Director may inflict an effect and/or Disadvantage, otherwise

Advantage / Disadvantage: The Combat Currency

Advantage and Disadvantage are shorthand for all the little things that would be a nightmare to track as separate rules:

Common sources of Advantage:

- **Position & Terrain**
  - higher ground on a wall or stair
  - fighting from behind a barricade, pews, or overturned cart
  - attacking from darkness into light
- **Surprise & Timing**
  - unseen approach, ambush from crypt entrance, bell-tower perch
  - striking mid-chant while the Choir's voice is committed elsewhere
- **Preparation**
  - shield properly braced
  - weapon set to receive a charge
  - Companion in position to Assist or Screen
- **Psychology**
  - enemy shaken by your presence as a Ral
  - foes witnessing undead allies cut down, Choir rites broken
  - invoking oaths, relics, or feared names mid-fight

Common sources of Disadvantage:

- **Bad Ground**
  - rubble, loose stone, collapsed graves
  - slick blood, oil, or rain on flags
- **Condition**
  - exhausted from forced march or earlier Clocks
  - burdened by relics, prisoners, or heavy gear
- **Numbers & Surroundings**
  - being outnumbered at Reach
  - being pressed against walls, pits, or into narrow alleys
  - fighting in cramped crypt passages where long weapons suffer
- **Supernatural Pressure**
  - low Choir hymns that gnaw at courage
  - Grave-flux or Corruption auras in certain sites
  - sensory distortion from failed Sorcery nearby

Director tip: Default to **±10 / ±20 /±30** modifiers and/or **Advantage/Disadvantage** instead of building new subsystems. In this setting, the terror and rot come from description, not from extra math.

Control Outcomes

A Ral can cleave men and corpses in half; that does not mean every fight should end in a corpse pile. Many of the most interesting outcomes are about **control**, not slaughter.

Treat these intents as fully valid "attacks":

- **Disarm**
  - Knock a spear from a Cantor's hands.
  - Force a guard to drop a lantern near oil.
- **Trip / Shove**

    - Send someone sprawling in a graveyard, into an open pit, against a wall.
    - Push a Choir acolyte off a stair or balcony.
- **Grapple / Pin**
    - Lock a cultist's arms to stop a rite.
    - Hold a possessed villager without killing them.
- **Drive Back**
    - Force enemies away from a threshold, chapel door, or relic-chest.
    - Push undead off a narrow bridge or causeway.
- **Protect**
    - Interpose shield or body between enemy and Companion / NPC.
    - Deny line-of-sight to a ranged attacker or ritualist.
- **Escape / Break Contact**
    - Withdraw from a losing fight.
    - Dive through a window, down a hole, or behind a gate before it closes.

On a Win:

- The control effect happens as intended.

On a Lesser Win:

- You achieve control, but at a cost:
    - you take a wound,
    - lose ground or footing,
    - drop something important,
    - trigger pursuit or alarm Clocks.

On a Loss:

- The opponent gains that control instead—
    - *you* are disarmed, shoved, pinned, or driven from the doorway.

Director note: Control is often what stakes the scene. Killing everyone can be easy for a Ral in some contexts; holding **one particular doorway** so villagers can flee is harder and more interesting.

Combat and Magick

Magick in *The Order of Ral*—Faith and Sorcery alike—does **not** replace combat rules.

It reshapes **positioning**:

- where people stand,
- what they fear,
- which Clocks advance.

When spells or rites are used in battle:

- **Harmful workings** (bolts of searing radiance, bone-shattering hexes, star-ice, withering touch)
    - deal **weapon-like damage**
    - apply armor DR as usual if the armor plausibly helps
    - may inflict specific Wound tags (burned, frozen, shattered) per Director judgment
- **Disruption workings**
    - most often create **Advantage/Disadvantage** or force movement:
        - blinding flash → Disadvantage on next exchange

        - sanctified ground → Disadvantage for undead crossing it
        - wave of force → Drive Back or Trip outcomes
        - ward-lines → restrict movement, funneling enemies
- **Essence & Actions**
    - magick costs **Essence**, which is scarce.
    - Calling on Faith or using Sorcery under pressure uses up main actions in the exchange.
    - The choice to cast is itself a **tactical risk**: if the working fails, that beat of combat is lost, and Sorcery failure can **inflict Corruption**.

Director cue: Sometimes it is better for a Ral to trust steel and shield than to risk an Essence-draining Sorcery working in the middle of a melee. Let that tension live in the fiction.

Common Complications

To keep fights grim, grounded, and specific to this world, lean on small, ugly complications:

- **Blood-slick Flags**
    - On a Lesser Win, someone stumbles, loses footing, or drops shield on the next beat.
- **Loose Grave-Stone / Bone Pile**
    - A toppled stone creates cover—or a trip hazard.
    - Scattering bones might unsettle villagers or signal the Choir.
- **Faltering Bell-rope**
    - A Companion trying to ring warning or invocation faces a tangled or frayed rope.
    - On a Loss, the bell fails and the village never hears.
- **Panicking Crowd**
    - Civilians push and shove at bottlenecks.
    - Line of fire gets clouded; social outcomes twist as witnesses remember who shoved whom.
- **Ritual in Progress**
    - Every exchange where the Precentor isn't interrupted, a **Ritual Clock** advances.
    - On certain ticks, new undead rise or the environment shifts (cold, darkness, whispers).
- **Unquiet Ground**
    - Fighting atop shallow graves lets a Lesser Win collapse earth, opening pits or releasing a grasping hand.

These are not separate systems—just invitations to make each fight in each miserable place feel different.

Willpower, Resolve & Morale Checks

The Order of Ral doesn't add a separate Willpower stat. You already have what you need:

- **Presence (PRE)** for fear, dread, temptation, keeping your head.
- **Endure Hardship / END** for pain, exhaustion, and physical breaking points.
- **Command** for the morale of groups under your banner.

Individual Resolve:
When a single character's nerve is in question, roll **d100 vs PRE** (or **Faith** for matters of belief, or **Endure Hardship/END** for pure suffering), applying the usual ±10/±20/±30 modifiers. Success: you hold. Lesser Win: you hold but flinch, stagger, or take a small consequence. Failure: you break as the fiction dictates.

Group Morale:
When a squad, patrol, or garrison might rout or hold, roll **Command** for their leader, modify for the circumstances, and tie the result to a **Morale Clock** (0/4 or 0/6). Ticks on that Clock represent mounting fear and strain; when it fills, the unit breaks.

Rals themselves do **not** roll for petty, mundane fear—they are already dead. Reserve Resolve checks for Choir dread, Corruption temptations, and the rare choices that might cost them what's left of their humanity.

Adversaries can simply use their Defense stat for similar tests, when called for by fiction or events.

Ending Fights Cleanly (Don't Grind)

A duel-focused game shines when fights end with a **decision**, not with everyone slowly shaving hit points off each other.

End combat when one of these happens:

- **One side escapes**
    - The Choir withdraws, knowing the node is lost.
    - The Ral and Companion break off to avoid Quietus.
- **One side surrenders**
    - Often due to **social pressure**, terror, or shattered morale rather than mercy.
    - Captured enemies can fuel interrogations, bargains, and ugly trade-offs later.
- **One side is disabled or cannot continue**
    - Wound tiers, conditions, or narrative exhaustion make further fighting meaningless.
- **A third party arrives and changes the stakes**
    - more undead, a Chapterhouse sortie, a mob of frightened villagers, a collapsing tower.
- **A Clock reaches breaking point**
    - Pursuit catches up,
    - Choir Notice triggers escalation,
    - Storm hits,
    - Structure collapses,
    - Stronghold Wear hits a threshold.

Director principle:
When the likely outcome is obvious—

- the last cultist cornered,
- the last corpse outmatched,
- the Ral clearly spent—

make a ruling and move on. Shift into consequences: Wounds, Corruption checks, NPC reactions, Stronghold Events. The world is full of other fights waiting to be lost or barely won.

Chapter 14: Downtime in a Broken Age

Rest, Recovery, and the Quiet Hours of the Dead

Ral do not sleep.

They remember what it felt like, sometimes—a weight behind the eyes, the numb drop into darkness, the way a dawn bell sounded different when you knew you had survived the night. Now their bodies simply... stop needing that. The heart slows. The flesh stills. The mind endures.

But the **world** still needs rest: companions, mounts, steel, leather, villagers, and the fragile line between sanity and the Grave Star. Even a death-knight must choose when to sheathe their blade, wipe blackened plate clean, and decide which wounds to tend and which to carry forward.

Downtime in *The Order of Ral* is where you decide how the scars of a mission settle:

- Which **Wounds** move from screaming to aching.
- How **Essence** seeps back into hollow bones.
- Whether **Corruption** hardens into habit or is burned off in penance.
- How **Companions**, **Mounts**, and **Chapterhouses** survive the cost of what you just did.

This chapter describes:

1. **Scales of Rest** – from quick breathers in bloody streets to month-long sanctuary in Chapterhouse stone.
2. **Healing & Stabilization** – when to roll, which skills matter, and when the fiction alone is enough.
3. **Essence & Magical Fatigue** – how Faith and Sorcery replenish.
4. **Lingering Harm & Long-Term Care** – what happens when Severe and Critical Wounds become part of you.
5. **Companions, Mounts & Base Recovery** – how those around you stagger back to their feet after you decide to stop killing things.

All of this assumes the **core One-on-One harm and test mechanics** already in place: Wound tiers, DoS/DoF, Edge, d100 resolution. Downtime is not a new engine; it is how you **let that engine breathe** in a world that does not.

Time Scales of Rest

Not all "rest" is the same. A single stolen minute behind a collapsed wall is not a week behind Chapterhouse stone.

Use these four scales to frame downtime:

- **A) Breather (Minutes)**
- **B) Camp Rest (A Night, Exposed)**
- **C) Hearth Rest (A Night, Sheltered)**
- **D) Sanctuary Rest (True Safety, Days to Weeks)**

Each has its own **fictional weight** and **mechanical expectations**.

Breather (Minutes)

A breather is the smallest kindness the world still allows.

The Ral braces against a wall or shattered pew while a Companion binds a strap, swaps a broken blade, or wipes gore from visor slits. A skin of water passes between gauntlets and trembling mortal hands. The air is still full of smoke, hymn echoes, or the echo of dying screams—but for a few minutes, no one is actively trying to kill you.

Use it for:

- Ending panic, shaking off immediate shock.
- Regaining basic **readiness** after a chase, duel, or short brutal fight.
- Emergency **triage**—stopping a Medium/Severe Wound from becoming a Critical Wound right now.

Typical outcome:

- Clears **scene-level penalties** like "staggered," "disoriented," or mild Fear penalties if fiction supports it.
- Allows **Stabilization** rolls vs freshly inflicted Wounds.
- Lets the Ral and Companions reposition, reload, redraw blades, and rethink.

Director cue: Clocks tick.

In unsafe places, a breather is **not free**:

- Taking even a few minutes often **ticks a Clock**:
  - **Pursuit Closing**,
  - **Choir Response**,
  - **Ritual Completion**,
  - **Weather Breaking**,
  - or **Supply Strain** if you're burning bandages, oil, or ammunition.

If the Protagonist insists on multiple breathers while deep inside a Choir node, each one should come with rising pressure—more voices in nearby corridors, more bells, more star-light leaking through stone.

Mechanical guidance (Breathers):

- **Wounds:**
  - You cannot *heal* a Wound tier with just a breather, but you can **Stabilize** a character at Critical or Severe (prevent escalation, stop bleed-out) with Healing/Medicine tests.
- **Essence:**
  - Module guidance: you may allow **+1 Essence** on a breather after intense use, *if* the fiction gives a moment of quiet prayer or grounding (Faith or meditative Sorcery discipline).
- **Conditions:**
  - Remove minor conditions like "winded", "off-balance", small temporary penalties, if the breather is actually calm enough.

Camp Rest (A Night, Exposed)

A night in the wild is rest. It is not safety.

The Ral sits motionless by a low fire that never quite warms anyone, while Companions share blankets, squabble over watch order, and listen for wolves or shovel-scrapes in the dark. Trees creak like gallows. The Grave Star, if visible, glows behind cloud like an eye behind gauze.

Use it for:

- **Meaningful recovery** when you cannot reach a roof, chapel, or Chapterhouse.
- Healing that goes beyond "patch and run" but still happens under threat.
- Roleplay-heavy scenes of fear, confession, or arguments.

Typical cost:

- Exposure (cold, damp, fog).
- Supply drain (firewood, food, bandages).
- **Risk of discovery** by predators, Choir scouts, or star-tainted beasts.

Director cue: Camp = Consequence.

A wild camp should nearly always come with **some risk**, articulated as:

- A **Clock**:
    - **Weather Breaking** (storm, snow, flood).
    - **Pursuit Closing** (Choir trackers, ghouls, wolves, raiders).
    - **Supply Strain** (eat into reserves; risk of hunger later).
- Or a **random encounter roll** adjusted by how careful the group is:
    - Good **Stealthcraft / Wilderness Survival / Beast Handling** tests can reduce risk.
    - Fire, noise, and large groups increase it.

Mechanical guidance (Camp Rest):

- **Wounds:**
    - **Light Wound:** often downgrades to **Healthy** after a secure Camp Rest if properly treated.
    - **Medium Wound:** may **downgrade to Light** with successful Healing/Herbalism and decent conditions.
    - **Severe/Critical:** usually hold steady; you can Stabilize and prevent escalation, but full healing will need time and/or Sanctuary (see §4).
- **Essence:**
    - Module guidance:
        - Camp Rest restores **a meaningful chunk** of Essence (e.g., ½ **Essence Max**, minimum 1), if the night is not brutally interrupted.
        - If the camp is plagued by alarms, encounters, or storms, reduce or deny this recovery.
- **Conditions:**
    - Removes **fatigue** from forced marching, clears temporary penalties from overexertion, if you allow true watches and warmth/dryness.
    - On the flip side, a *miserable* Camp (soaked, freezing) may actually **impose** new penalties or require END tests.

Hearth Rest (A Night, Sheltered)

Hearth Rest is a night under **some kind of roof**: a village inn, a barn loft, a shepherd's hut, an abandoned but intact chapel, a deep cave with a good fire.

There are doors, walls, something like privacy. There may be eavesdropping, spies, or rats—but the sky is not directly pressing on your face.

Use it for:

- **Strong, plot-forward recovery** that doesn't pause the campaign for weeks.
- Breathing space for social scenes with locals, rumors, and Companions.
- A chance to work on **minor crafting** or study between missions.

Typical cost:

- **Coin, barter, or favors.**
- **Social exposure:** people see where the Ral and their companions sleep.
- The attention of priests, witch-hunters, or Choir sympathizers.

Mechanical guidance (Hearth Rest):

- **Wounds:**
    - **Light Wound:** almost always recovers to **Healthy** after Hearth Rest with even minimal care.
    - **Medium Wound:** with proper Healing/Herbalism rolls and decent supplies:
        - **Downgrade to Light** after 1–2 Hearth Rests.
        - Bad conditions (squalid inn, lice, damp) may require tests to avoid infection.
    - **Severe Wound:** can be stabilized, and with excellent care may **shift toward Medium** across multiple Hearth Rests.
- **Essence:**
    - Module guidance:
        - Hearth Rest typically restores **full Essence** if the night is reasonably peaceful.
        - If the night is full of arguments, fear, or minor disturbances, at least ½ **Essence Max**.
- **Clocks & Events:**
    - Use Hearth Rest for **NPC relationship scenes**, rumors, small Stronghold-like events in town (supply offers, pleas for help, veiled threats).
- **Risk Level:**
    - Lower than Camp, but not zero.
    - Choir agents, witch-hunters, or thieves may come knocking.

Sanctuary Rest (True Safety)

Sanctuary Rest happens when you are somewhere the world itself agrees not to eat you—**for a while**.

- The **Chapterhouse of Ral** at decent Sanctity levels.
- A fully consecrated chapel under Church protection (for now).
- A fortified manor that has successfully repelled Choir for years.

Here, the Ral's plate is polished by hands that do not tremble (or tremble for different reasons). Companions sleep and wake without counting bells for alarms. Horses are groomed, hooves checked, barding mended. There is time to write reports, copy grimoires, and argue doctrine.

Use it for:

- **Clearing stacked consequences** (multiple Wounds, fatigue, mental strain) that would otherwise drag the Protagonist down.
- **Repairing gear** properly: armor dents, broken weapons, damaged relics.
- Deep **relationship and base development** scenes.
- Resetting pressure Clocks, or trading them for new ones.

Typical cost:

- **Hospitality credit** – you owe the Chapterhouse or host for the resources you consume.
- **Favors and oaths** – "we sheltered you; now we ask..."
- **Political entanglement** – people with power know that you slept here.

Mechanical guidance (Sanctuary Rest):

Sanctuary Rest is where you let mechanics **catch up** with what the story has done.

- **Wounds:**
  - Treat recovery as **multi-day** or **multi-week** processes guided by Healing/Herbalism, Medicine/Chirurgery, and time:
    - Light: gone after 1 Sanctuary Rest night.
    - Medium:
      - after several days of care, **downgrades to Light**;
      - another rest cycle clears Light.
    - Severe:
      - may take multiple weeks and successful medical tests to downgrade to Medium, then Light;
      - complications (infection, lingering weakness) can arise on failed tests.
    - Critical:
      - survival and recovery become **story arcs**, often requiring:
        - multiple Sanctuary Rests,
        - dedicated caregivers (Companions),
        - potential **scars** or permanent drawbacks even after healing.
- **Essence:**
  - Essence usually returns to **full** over the first Sanctuary Rest, provided the Ral is not under constant mental or spiritual assault.
- **Corruption & Humanity:**
  - Sanctuary is the best time for **Penance & Rites** (see Corruption chapter):

        - confession, vigil, ritual fasting, the cleaning of defiled relics, and acts of mercy can allow **Corruption reduction** if the Director and fiction support it.
- **Gear & Stronghold:**
    - Sanctuary Rest is when:
        - armor gets properly re-riveted (Smithing),
        - Boons are studied or adjusted,
        - Stronghold **Upgrades** and **Events** are advanced.
- **Rals and Sleeplessness:**
    - The Ral does not sleep, but **must still rest** mechanically:
        - They must *declare* that they are standing down from constant vigilance and violence.
        - If the Ral refuses all forms of rest, treat them as suffering **social, mental, and Essence fatigue** even if their body does not tire.

Sanctuary Rest is rare. Treat each one as a chapter break in the campaign's emotional rhythm.

Healing & Stabilization (Reference & Tone)

There is no such thing as "clean healing" in this setting.

Stitching is done by candlelight while someone screams into a leather strap. Bones are set by men who have seen too many snapped limbs to flinch when they break them again "properly." Herbs are mashed with a mortar that has also seen poisons. The Ral watches, unmoving, an audience of plate and dead eyes.

Use your **core One-on-One harm/wound handling exactly**:
Wound tiers, Wound stacking, DR, damage conversion.
This section tells you **when** to call for rolls and what tools matter.

Common Recovery Skills

Use existing Skills (and a few setting-specific ones):

- **Healing / Medicine/Chirurgery (INT)**
    - stabilization, serious care, infection prevention, bone-setting, stitching.
- **Herbalism (INT)**
    - salves, poultices, bruise and burn care, fevers, sedatives.
- **Athletics (END / GRC)**
    - rehabilitation: re-learning movement after Severe wounds, physical therapy, walking again without falling.
- **Wilderness Survival (AWR)**
    - creating safe shelters, fires, and dry bedding in hostile environments.
- **Crafting: Smithing & Wood/Leather (INT)**
    - splints, braces, crutches, improvised stretchers, armor repair.
- **Faith (PRE)**
    - prayerful rites for courage, and potentially small mechanical bonuses to Morale or Humanity/Corruption recovery during Sanctuary Rests.

Gear:

- **Healer's Kit**
    - Clean bandages, needles, alcohol or strong spirits, clamps, hooks.

    - Provides **+10 positioning** when supplies matter (e.g., filthy battlefield vs well-equipped Chapterhouse).
- **Herbal Pouch / Roll**
    - Dried herbs, simple salves, fever-reducing teas.
    - Provides **+10 positioning** when local plants/knowledge can augment treatment.
- **Warmth & Dry**
    - A good fire, dry blankets, and shelter often justify **Advantage** on recovery-related tests in harsh climates.
    - Half of medieval "medicine" is the absence of exposure.

When to Roll (Director Guidance)

Do **not** roll for every bandage. The dice come out when the result is uncertain and **interesting**.

Roll when:

- **Time is short**
    - You must stabilize someone mid-raid before reinforcements arrive.
- **The wound is severe**
    - Severe or Critical Wounds, crushed limbs, injuries from star-touched beings.
- **Conditions are filthy/wet/cold**
    - Mud, freezing rain, flooded trenches, plague trenches.
    - Failure might mean infection, fever, lost time.
- **The Protagonist is being hunted**
    - Pursuit Clocks tick while they try to treat someone in a ditch or ruined barn.
- **Failure would create an interesting consequence**
    - A scar, a limp, a phobia, or a new problem for the next mission.

If the Protagonist has:

- plenty of **time**,
- proper **tools**,
- adequate **shelter**, and
- no pressing **Clock**—

then **assume success** for sane, basic care. Save the dice for the moments that deserve them.

Essence Recovery & Magical Fatigue

Faith and Sorcery both can leave a Ral "hollow" in ways that even death could not.

After major workings—exorcising a Grave Lantern Ghost, raining star-fire on a Choir procession, or binding a Barrow Wraith—the Ral may feel **not tired, but *empty***. Downtime is when that emptiness slowly refills or curdles.

At the module level (respecting core rules):

- **Breather:**
    - May restore **+1 Essence** if the Ral consciously centers themselves—brief prayer, whispered names of the dead, focused breathing.
- **Camp Rest:**
    - Recovers a **meaningful portion** of Essence (often ½ **Essence Max**, rounding up), unless the camp is very disturbed.

- **Hearth Rest:**
    - Typically restores **full Essence** if the night is not violently interrupted.
- **Sanctuary Rest:**
    - Always restores **full Essence**, and may confer temporary buffs on the next Faith working or reduce the risk of Sorcery mishaps when sanctified spaces support the ritual.

Downtime scenes that focus on **faithful practice**, **meditation**, or **grim study**—copying spells, cleaning relics, reciting oaths—should be recognized in play:

- They justify Essence recovery.
- They can be required prerequisites before attempting particularly dangerous workings again.

Lingering Harm & Long-Term Care

Not every wound truly heals.

Some Severe and Critical Wounds, especially those sustained against Choir horrors or Eye-Fragments, leave permanent marks: missing fingers, stiff joints, lungs that never quite draw a full breath again, nights where a Ral stands at a window without moving for hours.

Downtime—especially **Sanctuary Rest**—is where you decide which injuries become:

- **Scars with no mechanical change**,
- **Ongoing penalties (e.g., –10 on certain actions)**, or
- **Traits**: "Lame," "Partially Deaf," "Burned Hands," tied into both fiction and mechanics.

Use **Clocks** for long-term recovery:

- **"Walk Again Without Cane (0–100)"**
    - progresses with successful Athletics + Healing/Medicine tests during Sanctuary Rest.
- **"Lung Fever Cleared (0–100)"**
    - progressed with Herbalism, Healing, and safe Hearth/Chapterhouse nights.

Failure can stall or regress clocks; success moves them forward. Some clocks may never reach 100 if the Protagonist chooses to lean into the scar instead.

Companions, Mounts & Downtime

Rals do not sleep, but **everyone around them does**.

Companions need time to let their hands stop shaking, to decide whether they want to keep following a death-knight into star-lit crypts. Mounts—especially undead war-horses—need time in the Chapterhouse stables to have barding repaired, bones inspected, and the Grave Bond tended.

- **Mounts:**
    - In **Camp Rest**, they regain lost Vitality, shake off fatigue, and can be examined for damage.
    - In **Hearth/Sanctuary Rest**, stable time may improve **Bond** (see your Mount/Grave Bond rules), especially if the Ral devotes scenes to grooming, riding drills, or silent vigil in the stable.
- **Secondary & Traveling Companions:**
    - Downtime is when they:
        - recover Wounds using the same mechanics,
        - decide whether to stay at the Chapterhouse or keep traveling,

        - advance **Relationship Tiers** (through conversations, shared work, or saved lives).
    - A Companion left without downtime between brutal missions will break somehow: leave, falter, or turn to something worse.

Putting It Together: Downtime As Rhythm

You can think of Downtime as the **pulse** of a Ral campaign:

- **Mission:**
    - fight, bleed, spend Essence, tick Clocks, push strongholds and villages closer to breaking.
- **Short Downtime (Breathers, Camps, Hearth Nights):**
    - patch, argue, forge alliances, make small choices about who gets treatment first.
- **Long Downtime (Sanctuary / Chapterhouse):**
    - advance arcs: Corruption, Sanctity, Stronghold Upgrades, Relationships, scars that become identity.

When in doubt:

- Ask the table:

    > "Are you trying to *press on*, or are you saying you **stand down** and let the world catch up with you?"

If they press on, offer **Breathers** and **Camp Rests** at best, with partial recovery and relentless Clocks.

If they stand down, let **Hearth Rest** or **Sanctuary Rest** do its work: heal bodies and gear, but pay for it with new obligations, politics, and the knowledge that while the dead-knights rested, the Choir moved somewhere else.

Ral do not sleep, but they still must decide when to stop killing and simply **endure**. Downtime is that decision, written into rules and scars.

BOOK III — DIRECTOR'S SECTION

Chapter 1: The Broken Realm – Key Locations

The world of the Ral is not a blank map waiting to be filled. It is already written in charred villages, toppled saints, and banners faded to rags. Every road a Ral rides has a memory; every skyline is a ledger of failures and unfinished wars.

Below are several of the key places that define this Broken Age—cities, strongholds, borderlands, and quiet towns whose names may outlast their people.

Vandross, the Shattered Crown

Once, Vandross was the beating heart of the old kingdom: a river-throne city of bridges and bell-towers, law courts, and saints' processions. From a distance, it still looks like that—stone rising out of mist, banners snapping atop bastions, barges crawling along the broad grey river.

Up close, the cracks show.

The old palace on the hill now wears the Choir's colors beside the faded royal standard. The king's line did not disappear; it bent. The current Crown sits in a hall where the murals of miracle and victory have been overpainted with pale stars and glorious deaths. The Choir calls this "continuity." Everyone else calls Vandross by its newer, whispered names: the Shattered Crown, the City That Forgot It Bled.

The city is divided in more than geography. Upland Vandross—the hill districts, palace quarter, and Temple Heights—belongs to the Choir and the nobility that capitulated. Here, star-priests preach order and "sanitized" faith from pulpits once devoted to saints. Choir Legates and Auditors move through marble colonnades, ink drying on new titles and new oaths. In official sermons, Athrakar is described not as a demon-god, but as "the final perfection of light"—a theology the old Church cannot fight openly anymore.

Low Vandross, along the river and in the warehouse warrens, tells a different story. Here the bells still ring for older saints behind shuttered doors; here old guilds still pass secret alms to fugitives and Ral sympathizers. Graffiti in chalk and blood marks which streets are safe for open prayer and which are watched. The night markets sell grain from Choir storehouses alongside contraband charms blessed by hedge-priests who hide their faces. The watch patrols in twos and threes, and sometimes one of them looks away at exactly the right moment.

Vandross is where compromises go to rot. Merchants tithe to both Choir and Chapterhouse, playing a quiet game of survival. Some Rals refuse to enter the city at all, calling it "a wound that chose to scar wrong." Others ride in under cloak and false heraldry, knowing that the river of rumor that runs through Vandross shapes half

the realm: bounties, heresies, whispers of new nodes awakening.

For the Order, Vandross is not just a capital. It is a measuring stick. If Vandross can be shaken—if even one Choir temple-fortress there falls—it will echo across every smaller town still pretending things are normal.

The Chapterhouse of Ral at Blackbarrow

Blackbarrow sits where three ridges meet, on a shelf of dark stone pocked with old burial mounds. Before the Grave Star rose, this was already a place of skulls: battlefield graves, plague pits, and the tombs of forgotten lords. The Order did not build their Chapterhouse here by accident; they claimed what the world had already admitted it was.

From the valley floor, the Chapterhouse looks like a ruined fortress at first glance: curtain walls patchworked with mismatched stone, battlements broken, one tower listing slightly inward as if tired. Closer, the details emerge. The walls are marked with the sigil of the Order—Ral Parthanus' device, a broken sun over a resting sword—carved over older heraldry. Fresh mortar binds bones into the foundations, not as decoration but as anchors for rites. The main gate bears deep grooves where undead hordes and Choir rams once tested it. Some of those marks are very recent.

Inside, the courtyard is never quiet. Gravesquires drill in battered mail, confusing their living bodies with the disciplined stillness of the Rals on the walls. Relic-smiths haul broken plate and grave-iron into the forges, sparks rising in a constant haze from chimneys. Messengers arrive ragged from their rides, carrying news from far provinces; they leave again with bundles of sealed orders under their cloaks. A half-dozen different smells share the air: hot metal, stale incense, old sweat, and the faint sour tang of embalming oils.

Beneath the stone, the Chapterhouse dives deep. Catacombs house the resting places of fallen Rals, their armor and mounts interred with them until the Order can no longer accept their loss and attempts something unwise. Below those silent ranks lie ossuaries—and deeper still, locked chambers where the Order keeps things it cannot destroy but dares not leave in the Choir's hands. The strongest Sanctity in the realm smolders here, but so does a density of Corruption that would choke a lesser place; the two forces do not cancel, they grind.

Blackbarrow is not just a fortress. It is a monastery, a war college, and a confessional where no one is entirely clean. Aspirants undergo their first tests here. Rals return here between campaigns to have armor reforged, bones repaired, and sins counted. Secondary Companions live and work in its shadow: smiths, healers, archivists, cooks, children who have never seen a world where the dead stay down.

Every decision the Chapterhouse makes radiates outward. Which villages to abandon. Which lords to support. Which Choir nodes to leave untouched a little longer because the price would be too high. A Ral may ride alone on the road, but their shadow always stretches back to Blackbarrow's walls.

Lowharrow, the Lantern Port

On maps, Lowharrow is a medium-sized coastal town, a convenient harbor along a grey and windswept sea. On approach, especially at night, it looks like a string of floating skulls.

Lanterns hang from every pier, jetty, and harbor crane; each holds a human skull bound in iron bands, faint star-pale light burning within the bone. From a distance, they shimmer like a necklace of cold fire. Sailors who have never been here before fall quiet when they first see it.

The story the townsfolk tell is that the lanterns were a gift. When the Grave Star's storms began to grow worse and the waters swelled with drowned dead, a Choir Legate came and offered "protection": skull-lights that would hold back fog and shambling corpses, calm the sea's temper near the harbor mouth. The deal was accepted. Trade returned. The docks revived. No one speaks too loudly about what was traded in return.

By day, Lowharrow is busy. Fishwives shout on the piers, sailors mend lines, merchants haggle over crates of grain and casks of salted meat. The skull-lanterns are hooded in steel shades to blunt their glow, but their presence is constant. Children play games about "don't let the skull see you." Dockside taverns sell stories as readily as ale: sighting Rals along the coast roads, plague across the water, Choir fleets massing somewhere beyond the horizon.

By night, the town feels like a stage set for some otherworldly performance. The lanterns beam their white-blue light out over the waves, keeping fog at bay and revealing every ship that dares approach. Shadows move strangely under that light, stretching long and thin. Undead rarely breach the harbor's edge; when they do, something in the lanterns' burn drives them back shrieking—but living eyes cannot look at the skulls for too long without their dreams souring.

Lowharrow sits on a knife-edge politically. The Choir considers it a success story: a demonstration of the benefits of cooperation. The Church remnants see those same lanterns as an unforgivable abomination. *The Order of Ral* sees a node of influence—and a tempting target. To take Lowharrow away from the Choir would mean extinguishing, corrupting, or reclaiming the lantern-net. Every option has a cost: undead pouring into the streets, storms returning, trade collapsing.

For Rals, Lowharrow is often the last sane harbor before a sea journey into Choir-dominated coasts. For the people of Lowharrow, the Rals are a rumor—until one rides out of the mist one night, bared helm reflecting the skull-light like a second, smaller dead star.

Harrowfen Watch, the Saint's Broken Tower

High in the mountain passes stands Harrowfen Watch, a stone tower clinging to the cliff like a broken tooth. The road beneath it is the fastest route between two major river valleys, and thus between two halves of the kingdom. Long before the Choir rose, the tower was dedicated to Saint Harrowfen, a warrior-saint who held the pass against invaders in some half-remembered war.

Pilgrims still come, though fewer each year, climbing the steep path to touch the weather-worn statue in the courtyard. The saint's face is all but gone, eaten by snow and lichen, but the sword in their stone hands still points down toward the road as if measuring every traveler.

Harrowfen has changed owners many times. The old Church held it once, then a line of knights, then a border lord who used it to tax everything that moved. Now the Choir and the Order circle it warily. On some days, Choir banners fly from the parapets and star-priests fortify the chapel with new hymns. On other days, the sky shows only the ash-grey pennon of Ral, and the bones of recent invaders dry on the scree below.

The watch itself is cramped and cold. Hallways bend at odd angles where repairs never quite matched the original design. The lower levels are practical: barracks, armory, stables for a handful of mounts. The upper levels are stranger. The saint's chapel has been desecrated, reconsecrated, and desecrated again so many times that Sanctity and Corruption sting the air together. The bell-tower houses a cracked bell whose tone has shifted over the years, sometimes oddly close to the Choir's chants. No one is entirely sure which way the saint leans now.

Harrowfen is rarely at peace. Even when no army clogs the road below, there is tension in the air: merchants arguing with toll-collectors, pilgrims begging passage, fugitives pleading for sanctuary. Different factions within the Church and the Order argue over how tightly

to hold it; some say the tower is a sacred trust, others that it has become a cursed fulcrum for Athrakar's influence.

For a Ral, riding into Harrowfen can feel like stepping into the middle of a family argument that happened generations ago and never ended. The stones remember every oath sworn and broken here. The question each new visitor must answer—whether they know it or not—is simple: *whose saint is Harrowfen now?*

The Redmere Vale

The Redmere Vale looks like a painting of pastoral peace at first. Gently rolling hills, orchards thick with fruit, a river running slow and clear. Smoke rises from farmhouse chimneys in thin, orderly lines. Children play between the trees. The wind carries the smell of apples and earth.

Stay longer than an hour and the wrongness creeps in.

The fruit never seems to rot on the branch. A few shriveled apples cling stubbornly through winter. The people are hale, too hale for a region that has known famine and plague. Their cheeks bloom red, their eyes bright. They move with a slightly too-steady grace. When they laugh, it is just a little too loud and just a little too synchronized, like a choir staying on the beat.

Redmere's secret lies in the soil. Years ago, when blight threatened to wipe the valley out, the Orchard Wardens accepted quiet help from a passing Choir Deacon: a ritual to "awaken" the trees, watered with blood over sigils carved into their roots. Now the trees drink more than rain. The land yields plenty, and the price is slow, thorough corruption.

The villagers do not think of themselves as cultists. They think of themselves as survivors. They bring wounded strangers to the orchard edge to drink juice that "helps them heal." They bury their dead near the oldest trees because "it is good to give back to the earth." They are kind, warm, and deeply dangerous, especially to a Ral who walks openly as an enemy of their unseen patron.

At night, the orchard is a different place. The trees creak in wind that isn't there. Fruit glows faintly under the Grave Star's light. Sometimes the shapes hanging from branches are not apples. Voices whisper between rows: offers of eternal harvest, of soil that will never reject you, of roots that will hold your bones when all else fails.

For the Order, Redmere is a moral sore spot. Cutting it out would mean starving half the region; leaving it alone means letting Athrakar's influence spread through every barrel of cider and sack of dried fruit that leaves the valley. Some Rals have sworn never to ride there again after seeing what "prosperity" now looks like. Others make quiet, bloody trips in the night, trying to salvage what souls they can one family at a time.

Ashgate, the Pilgrim Road Town

Ashgate squats astride the old pilgrim road like a tired dog by the hearth. Its name comes from the stone gatehouse at its center, blackened by the smoke of countless roadside fires and siege attempts. Once, this was a joyous place: pilgrims camped three-deep on holy days, banners fluttered from inns, relic vendors hawked dubious splinters of saints.

Now the pilgrims are fewer, and the banners share space with Choir insignia.

The town is built in layers around the gate. Closest to the road, the inn-yards and stables bear the scars of decades of traffic: grooved cobbles, worn lintels, stable posts polished by a thousand reins. Behind them, a ring of houses huddles along the inner streets, their upper stories leaning out as if trying to see who is coming. At the heart of it all lies the gatehouse, through which the pilgrim road narrows and then passes into the hills beyond.

Ashgate lives on what passes through it. Today that means less holy traffic and more mixed caravans: merchants under Choir protection, fugitives hoping the old waystation shrines still offer sanctuary, Chapterhouse riders in plain cloaks. The toll-keepers at the gate are experts at reading faces. They know which wagons to search for contraband icons, which to quietly wave through out of respect—or fear—for certain sigils burned into saddles.

Rumors cling to Ashgate like ash to stone. People whisper that the Choir has buried a minor node beneath the gatehouse itself, so each passing step strengthens Athrakar's hold. Others claim the opposite: that the foundation stones still carry a saint's blessing strong enough to twist any ritual attempted there. The truth shifts with each generation of officials and each secret pact.

Ashgate is a place where Rals often pass in and out of legend. Stablehands tell stories of silent armored riders who needed no rooms and kept watch beside their horses all night. Old innkeepers remember the first time a Ral paid in ancient coin, or with a favor instead of silver. Choir informers listen carefully for mention of "Ral" and "pilgrim road" in the same breath.

For a campaign, Ashgate is a crossroads in every sense. A Ral can find Gravesquires here, follow the trail of smashed shrines, or discover that the gate itself may soon be repurposed: either as a Choir checkpoint that will strangle the old roads, or as the site of a desperate last stand.

Greyhollow, the Plague City

Greyhollow sits in a bowl of low hills, as if the land itself tried to hold something in and failed. From a distance, its walls are intact, its towers still upright. Only the color gives it away: everything is the same flat, leached grey, as though someone dipped the city in ash.

The plague struck Greyhollow early, and the Choir arrived late. By the time Athrakar's priests took interest, half the population was dead, the other half barricaded in their homes. What the Choir found here was not a city to conquer, but a laboratory.

They sealed the gates under the pretense of "containment" and began work: cataloguing the dead, measuring the spread, experimenting with plague carts and Plague Wights. As years passed, they loosened their grip publicly—the worst was over, they said—but in truth Greyhollow remains a testing ground. New strains of disease pass through its alleys. New rites are tried in its cathedrals-turned-theatres.

Those who still live inside have adapted in strange ways. They speak softly, hoard masks and herbs, and treat every outsider as a potential vector of doom. They have their own saints now: mothers who kept families alive on thin soups, gravediggers who buried the dead with respect when no priest would come, a wild-eyed healer who burned three whole blocks of houses to stop the spread and still walks the streets with the smell of smoke around him.

Undead are everywhere here, but not always hostile. Some roam in set patterns, remnants of Choir trials that never fully unwound. Children learn which squares to avoid at night, which wells to never drink from, which streets belong to the dead and which to the living. The border between those categories shifts with each experiment.

For the Order, Greyhollow is a wound that cannot be closed. Destroying every Choir presence would still leave the city poisoned; ignoring it means allowing a source of evolving plagues to stand. Rals who ride here often find themselves performing acts of mercy rather than battles: escorting survivors out, recovering notes from doctors who died trying to understand the horrors, destroying a single key Plague-Deacon while leaving the rest of the Choir's edifice untouched—for now.

Stormbridge, the Fractured Free City

Stormbridge takes its name from the great stone bridge that spans the churning river at its heart. The river is too deep and too wild for fords; the bridge is the only crossing for many leagues. Because of that, Stormbridge has always been a prize—and, occasionally, a miracle.

The city sprawls on both banks, each side with its own character. On the western bank, ancient walls still stand in part, studded with towers flying whatever banner currently holds majority sway. On the eastern bank, newer districts have grown like fungus: wooden tenements, warehouses, shanties for refugees from Choir lands and war-torn baronies. The bridge itself is lined with houses, shops, and shrines clinging to its sides, so that crossing it feels like walking through a crowded street suspended over a roaring gorge.

Stormbridge's charter once made it a free city under neither crown nor church. It elected its own council and paid mercenaries to keep the peace. That principle of independence has survived in tattered form; now the city plays a dangerous balancing act between three powers: the Choir, the vestiges of royal authority, and the Chapterhouse of Ral.

Choir agents hold some guilds by the purse strings and some shrines by threat of excommunication-from-life. Church loyalists cling to old cathedrals and tailor new doctrines that condemn both Athrakar and the Order in equal terms. Meanwhile, Ral sympathizers quietly recruit in the inns and fighting pits, promising that only the damned can hold the line.

Deals are made here that decide whether villages far away receive food or starve. Bounties are posted and quietly withdrawn. Smugglers run blessed relics upriver one night and star-forged steel downriver the next. Stormbridge is a place where a Ral in full armor can walk the streets in daylight—but only if they accept that every eye is measuring how much they are worth, dead or alive.

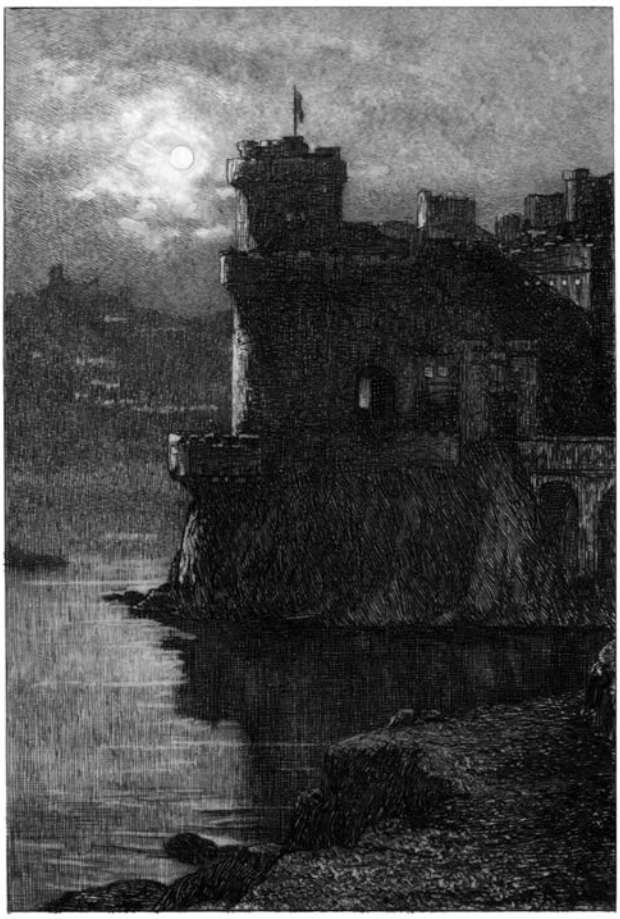
The city feels constantly on the brink of riot. The wrong incident—a Choir Auditor overstepping, a Ral cutting down the wrong noble, a plague scare—could turn bridge and banks into a single, sprawling battlefield. For now, everyone pretends to prefer profit to martyrdom. The bridge stands. The storm gathers.

These are not the only important places in the realm, but they are the ones whose names Rals and Choir priests alike say with a certain weight. They are anchors: for trade, for faith, for fear, for hope. Every campaign in *The Order of Ral* will, sooner or later, feel their gravity—whether the Protagonist rides through their gates in full plate, or only hears of them in the trembling voice of a refugee who has seen too much of what waits there.

Chapter 2: Strongholds of the Damned

Part One

"Every Chapterhouse is a tomb that refused to stay quiet.
Stone remembers screams. Wood remembers smoke.
We live in what we could not afford to lose."
— Ral Parthanus



The **Chapterhouse of Ral** is more than walls and armories. It is a contradiction hammered into stone:

- A fortress built to **hold back the dead**,
- Staffed by **undead knights** who refuse to stop working,
- Sitting in a world where every year the Choir presses closer.

In this module, the Chapterhouse is the **primary Home Base**. It is where the Protagonist Ral returns between campaigns, licks wounds, argues with clergy, hires Secondary Companions, and decides what can be saved with the resources they have left.

At campaign start, the Chapterhouse is **not** a shining bastion. It is:

- **Crumbling** – half-ruined, under-maintained.
- **Besieged** – actively under threat by undead or Choir forces.
- **Mostly abandoned** – a relic with only a skeleton crew remaining.

The exact mix is your choice. The important thing is that the stronghold feels like a **character**: wounded, stubborn, and full of ghosts.

How the Ral Gets Their Stronghold

Before you define walls and resource pools, decide **how** this Ral came to hold a Chapterhouse at all. That answer shapes the first arcs of the campaign.

You have three default frames; you can mix or customize as needed.

Frame A: The Last Chapterhouse

The campaign opens on the **last functioning Chapterhouse** in an entire region.

- Once, there were several. The Choir has taken or corrupted the rest.
- The High Command (if it still exists) has diverted what remains to this one bastion.

- The Protagonist Ral is assigned here as senior field operative, de facto **Marshal of a dying Order**.

This frame emphasizes:

- **Defensive play**: holding out as long as possible.
- Political pressure from kings and bishops who fear hosting undead knights.
- The grim knowledge that **if this place falls**, the region will drown in the Choir.

Mechanically, this frame begins with:

- Decent **Assets**, but high **threat** and growing **Stress** (see below).

Frame B: The Fallen House Reclaimed

The campaign opens with a **ruined Chapterhouse** retaken from undead or human occupiers.

- The initial session may be the assault itself.
- The Ral drives out horrors, clears the crypts, and re-lights cold hearths.
- What remains is ragged: collapsed halls, broken wells, scattered relics.

This frame emphasizes:

- **Restoration and rebuilding**: the stronghold grows with each victory.
- Escalating retaliation from forces that once claimed the ruins.
- The tension between **old ghosts** and new occupants.

Mechanically, this frame begins with:

- Very low **Assets**, many facilities damaged or absent, but **plenty of room** for upgrades.

Frame C: The Secret Undercroft

The campaign opens beneath a living city or great fortress—the Chapterhouse is a **hidden undercroft**.

- Officially, the Order has no presence here.
- A sympathetic noble, guild, or temple quietly ceded forgotten cellars and tunnels.
- You operate in the shadows, surrounded by the living who do not know what is under their feet.

This frame emphasizes:

- **Covert operations**: balancing secrecy with the need to act.
- Constant risk of discovery by both Choir and mundane authorities.
- Politics: the Chapterhouse is part sanctuary, part powder keg.

Mechanically, this frame begins with:

- Moderate **Assets**, but limited **space** for overt upgrades and strong social constraints.

Choose one frame. Or write your own. The point is that at the start of the campaign, the Protagonist can point to a particular place on the map and say:

> "That is my house. If it falls, I fall with it."

The Chapterhouse Stat Block

To keep the stronghold mechanically manageable, we treat it as a "Character of Stone," with its own simple stats and tags.

Chapterhouse of Ral — Stat Elements

1. **Location Tags**
    - Choose 1–2:
        - Borderland Ruin
        - City Undercroft

- Mountain Redoubt
- River Fort
- Cliffside Monastery
- Fortress-Temple

2. **State at Start**
    - Choose 1 (or blend two):
        - Crumbling (structurally weak, low Repair)
        - Besieged (immediate external threat)
        - Mostly Abandoned (few staff, many empty halls)
3. **Asset Pools**
   These are your analogues to Trade/Resource values—abstract ratings for what the Chapterhouse can bring to bear.
    - **Supply (SUP)** – food, coin, mundane gear, basic trade value.
    - **Hands (HND)** – staff, laborers, militia, skilled artisans.
    - **Sanctity (SCT)** – relics, shrines, wards, spiritual favor.

   All three are rated **0–100**, though you will typically track them in increments of 5 or 10.
    - **0–19**: Barely functional
    - **20–49**: Strained, but viable
    - **50–79**: Solid, sustainable
    - **80–100**: Rich / exemplary (rare and unstable in this setting)
4. **Stress & Wear Tracks**

   The fortress also has two long-form Clocks:
    - **Structure Wear (0–100)**
        - 0–24: Hairline cracks, sagging beams.
        - 25–49: Leaks, weak sections, minor collapses.
        - 50–74: Serious breaches, unsafe towers, failing defenses.
        - 75–100: On the brink; large portions unusable or dangerous.
    - **Spiritual Stress (0–100)**
        - 0–24: Restless dead, minor unease in chapels.
        - 25–49: Hauntings, sour miracles, small ward failures.
        - 50–74: Relic silence, nightmares, Faith Tests often suffer penalties.
        - 75–100: The Chapterhouse risks slipping partially into the Choir's orbit.
5. **Facilities & Tags**

   The base has a number of **Facility Tags**, each either:
    - **Absent**,
    - **Damaged**, or
    - **Functional** (later: **Enhanced**).

   Core facilities to consider at start:
    - **Armory** – stores of weapons and armor.
    - **Reliquary** – relic chambers, saint-bones, enchanted items.
    - **Infirmary** – mortal sick-beds, chirurgical tools for Medicine/Chirurgery.

- **Crypts** – burial vaults, ossuaries, Ral resting-places.
- **Library** – tomes, maps, Choir records, theology.
- **Shrine / Chapel** – active place of worship.
- **Stables** – mundane and undead war-horse facilities.

Additional, more advanced facilities are covered later in the book.

Base Creation Procedure

At campaign start, walk through the following steps with the Director and Protagonist.

Step 1: Choose Location Tags

Pick 1–2 tags. These will shape:

- Likely threats,
- Trade routes,
- Who visits,
- And how easy it is to flee.

Example:

- **Mountain Redoubt, Borderland Ruin**
- **City Undercroft, Fortress-Temple**

These tags can justify Advantage/Disadvantage on later Stronghold-related Tests.

Step 2: Set Starting State

Pick or blend from:

- **Crumbling** – Structure Wear begins at 40–60; many facilities Damaged.
- **Besieged** – External enemy Clocks are already ticking; Supply is strained.
- **Mostly Abandoned** – Hands is low, Sanctity may be fragile, but there is space.

Example starting bands:

- Crumbling: SUP 40, HND 30, SCT 30, Structure Wear 50, Spiritual Stress 20.
- Besieged: SUP 30, HND 50, SCT 40, Structure Wear 30, Spiritual Stress 40.
- Mostly Abandoned: SUP 20, HND 20, SCT 35, Structure Wear 40, Spiritual Stress 15.

Tailor to taste. The Chapterhouse should feel **strained, but not hopeless**.

Step 3: Set Initial Facilities

For each core facility, assign:

- **Functional**, **Damaged**, or **Absent**.

A default for a battered but usable house might be:

- Armory – Functional
- Reliquary – Damaged
- Infirmary – Damaged
- Crypts – Functional
- Library – Damaged
- Shrine / Chapel – Functional but modest
- Stables – Functional

Damaged facilities impose penaltie or partial access (e.g., only basic gear from a damaged Armory; fewer spells or rites from a damaged Reliquary).

Step 4: Initial Assets & Hooks

Choose 1–3 **special hooks** for the Chapterhouse, such as:

- "**Last Relic of the Sun-Host**" – a single potent relic in the damaged Reliquary.
- "**Silent Bell-Tower**" – a signal tower that no longer rings properly.

- **"Unmapped Below"** – crypt levels that have never been secured.

Write one or two sentences for each. These become obvious targets for early adventures and upgrades.

Claiming the Chapterhouse in Play

If the campaign starts with the Ral **acquiring** the stronghold rather than already holding it:

1. **Assault or Inheritance Scenario**
    - Run a short arc where the Ral:
        - Retakes the ruins from undead/Choir forces, **or**
        - Arrives to formally assume command of a neglected house, **or**
        - Is smuggled into the undercroft by allies to set up a secret base.
2. **Stronghold Claim Test**

    At the climax, call for a **Command**, **Faith**, or **Warfare & Strategy** Test (depending on framing) to represent the Ral's ability to impose order.
    - **Success:**
        - The Chapterhouse is established under their authority.
        - Set Assets at the higher end of your chosen starting range.
    - **Lesser Win / Mixed:**
        - The Chapterhouse is claimed, but something crucial goes wrong:
            - A section remains overrun.
            - A relic is lost.
            - Local authorities are offended.
    - **Failure:**
        - The Chapterhouse remains unstable:
            - Structure Wear or Spiritual Stress starts 10–20 points higher.
            - A faction (Choir cell, noble house, rival order) has a stake inside the walls.
3. **Oath of the Stone**

    After claiming, the Ral is expected to swear an **Oath to the House** (if they have an Oath Boon, you can tie it here):

    > "This stone and these dead are under my watch.
    > So long as I endure, this House will not fall by my neglect."

    This vow can later interact with Oath Boons like **Chain-Bound to Duty** or **Last Watch Undying**.

Part Two

Upgrades, Defenses & Domain

The Chapterhouse is not static. As the campaign unfolds, the Ral uses limited resources to:

- Patch walls, sanctify chapels, and rebuild libraries.
- Prepare for sieges, raids, and subtle infiltration.
- Turn the stronghold itself into a lever against the Choir.

This chapter gives you:

- A simple **Upgrade** framework,
- Guidelines for **defensive scenarios**,
- And rules for treating the base as a **living character** with Stress and Wear.

Upgrades & Facilities

Upgrades consume **Supply**, **Hands**, **Sanctity**, and time. They may also require successful Tests.

Below are example upgrades; you can invent more using the same pattern.

Each entry lists:

- **Requirements** – Minimum Asset levels, prerequisite facilities, etc.
- **Cost** – Reduction in Assets.
- **Time** – Downtime required (in weeks/months of game time).
- **Tests** – Skills to roll; pass for best result.
- **Benefit** – Mechanical effect.

Repaired Curtain Walls

- **Requirements:** Structure Wear ≤ 60, Hands ≥ 30, Supply ≥ 30
- **Cost:** –10 Supply, –10 Hands
- **Time:** 1–2 in-game months
- **Tests:**
  - **Stronghold Management** or **Warfare & Strategy** to organize work
  - **Crafting: Smithing** or **Crafting: Wood/Leather** for key segments
- **Benefit:**
  - **Structure Wear –15** (immediate reduction)
  - During sieges, all **ranged Defense** and **Siege & Demolition** Tests from defenders gain **+10** when using walls as main line.

Warded Gate & Kill-Zone

- **Requirements:** Wardcraft: Salt & Sigil ≥ 40% (in house), Sanctity ≥ 30
- **Cost:** –10 Supply, –5 Hands, –5 Sanctity
- **Time:** 3–4 weeks
- **Tests:**
  - **Wardcraft: Salt & Sigil** to inscribe defensive wards
  - **Siege & Demolition** to design kill-zones and choke points
- **Benefit:**
  - First assault on the gate in any siege suffers **–10** to enemy Siege / Assault Tests.
  - Once per siege, the defenders may treat a failed **Siege Defense Test** at the gate

as a **Lesser Win** instead (the wards flare, barely holding).

Sanctified Inner Chapel

- **Requirements:** Shrine Functional, Sanctity ≥ 40
- **Cost:** –10 Sanctity (expending relic fragments, incense, and offerings)
- **Time:** 2–3 weeks of dedicated rites
- **Tests:**
    - **Faith** and **Theology** (multi-roll ceremonial sequence)
- **Benefit:**
    - While the Chapel remains intact, Faith spells cast **within the Chapterhouse** gain **+10** to casting Tests.
    - Once per fortnight, a Ral may perform penance here to attempt **Corruption reduction** (per Corruption chapter).

Alchemical Lab

- **Requirements:** Library at least Damaged, Alchemy ≥ 40% present
- **Cost:** –15 Supply, –5 Hands
- **Time:** 1 month
- **Tests:**
    - **Alchemy** and **Stronghold Management**
- **Benefit:**
    - Downtime **Alchemy** work for the Ral or Secondary Companions gains **Advantage** while using the lab.
    - Once per month, the lab can produce **one batch of special munitions** (firepots, corpse-burning oil, plague smoke), granting **+10** to a single Ral-led engagement that uses them.

Scriptorium Stack

- **Requirements:** Library Damaged or better, Scholar ≥ 40% present
- **Cost:** –10 Supply, –5 Hands
- **Time:** 1–2 months
- **Tests:**
    - **Scholar**, **Scribing & Administration**
- **Benefit:**
    - Research-based Tests using **Lore** or **Scholar** gain **+10** when using the Scriptorium.
    - Once per month, you may declare that the archives contain a **lead** that turns a vague rumor into a concrete quest hook (Director provides an actionable adventure location).

Crypt Purge & Retuning

- **Requirements:** Crypts Functional or Damaged, Spiritual Stress ≥ 30
- **Cost:** –5 Sanctity, –5 Hands (morale and time)
- **Time:** 2–4 weeks
- **Tests:**
    - **Exorcism & Banishment**, **Faith**, **Corpses & Remains**
- **Benefit:**
    - **Spiritual Stress –15**.
    - For the next siege or major haunting event, the Director must roll twice and take the **lesser** result when determining whether internal undead "wake up" inside the Chapterhouse.

Ossuary Reinforcement Vaults

- **Requirements:**
  Crypts Functional, Structure Wear ≤ 70, Sanctity ≥ 25
- **Cost:**
  –5 Supply, –10 Hands, –5 Sanctity
- **Time:**
  1 month
- **Tests:**
  - Gravecraft or Corpses & Remains to reorganize remains safely
  - Crafting: Stone/Smithing (use Smithing) to reinforce supports
- **Benefit:**
  - Reduces the chance of internal undead uprisings:
    - Once per month, you may ignore or downgrade one internal crypt-related Threat Event.
  - Spiritual Stress –10 immediately.
  - Crypt-based Facilities are less likely to become Damaged during sieges.

Bell of the Last Watch

- **Requirements:**
  Bell-Tower or High Structure present, Sanctity ≥ 35
- **Cost:**
  –10 Supply, –5 Hands, –10 Sanctity
- **Time:**
  2–3 weeks
- **Tests:**
  - Faith or Theology to consecrate the bell
  - Crafting: Smithing to hang and balance it
- **Benefit:**
  - Once per siege or major assault, the bell may be rung to grant:
    - +10 to all defender **Morale-related Tests** for the duration of the scene.
  - Undead attackers suffer –10 on the first coordinated assault after the bell rings.
  - Ringing the bell increases Spiritual Stress by +5 afterward (the dead listen).

Expanded Stables & Grave-Mount Pits

- **Requirements:**
  Stables Functional, Hands ≥ 30
- **Cost:**
  –10 Supply, –5 Hands
- **Time:**
  1 month
- **Tests:**
  - Beast Handling or Riding to design proper undead mount accommodations
  - Stronghold Management to allocate labor and space
- **Benefit:**
  - Mount Bond advancement downtime at the Chapterhouse gains **Advantage**.
  - Once per campaign arc, you may restore a damaged or nearly destroyed undead mount without permanent loss.
  - During pursuits starting from the Chapterhouse, mounted Rals gain +10 to the first Riding or Mounted Combat Test.

Black Salt Ward Network

- **Requirements:**
  Wardcraft: Salt & Sigil ≥ 40 present, Sanctity ≥ 40
- **Cost:**
  –10 Supply, –10 Sanctity

- **Time:**
  3–4 weeks
- **Tests:**
  - Wardcraft: Salt & Sigil
  - Theology or Lore: Arcane to align symbols correctly
- **Benefit:**
  - Reduces the effectiveness of enemy Sorcery within the walls:
    - Enemy Sorcery casting Tests suffer –10 while inside the Chapterhouse.
  - Once per fortnight, may negate 1 Corruption gain caused by an external ritual effect.
  - If the wards are breached, Spiritual Stress +10 immediately.

The Reliquary Depths (Sub-Reliquary)

- **Requirements:**
  Reliquary Damaged or better, Structure Wear ≤ 60
- **Cost:**
  –15 Supply, –5 Hands, –10 Sanctity
- **Time:**
  2 months
- **Tests:**
  - Scholar or Lore: Saints & Relics
  - Stronghold Management to secure secrecy and access
- **Benefit:**
  - Allows safe storage of **dangerous or unstable relics**.
  - Once per month, a relic stored here may be "stabilized," removing a narrative drawback or reducing Spiritual Stress impact when used.
  - If overused, the Director may introduce a relic-focused Event.

Barracks of the Bound Oath

- **Requirements:**
  Hands ≥ 40, Command ≥ 40 present
- **Cost:**
  –10 Supply, –10 Hands
- **Time:**
  1–2 months
- **Tests:**
  - Command to organize training doctrine
  - Oratory to instill discipline and purpose
- **Benefit:**
  - Garrison morale improves:
    - All **defensive Command Tests** within the Chapterhouse gain +10.
  - Once per siege, you may treat one failed defender Morale Test as a Lesser Win.
  - If neglected, discipline issues may arise faster than normal.

Hall of Names (Memorial Chamber)

- **Requirements:**
  Crypts Functional, Sanctity ≥ 30
- **Cost:**
  –5 Supply, –10 Sanctity
- **Time:**
  2 weeks
- **Tests:**
  - Theology or Lore: Kingdoms to record names and deeds
  - Faith to properly dedicate the chamber
- **Benefit:**

- Once per campaign arc, a Ral may invoke the Hall to gain **Advantage on a single Presence-based Test** tied to duty, sacrifice, or remembrance.
- Reduces Corruption gain from Quietus-related trauma by 1 (minimum 0) for that scene.
- If desecrated, Spiritual Stress spikes dramatically.

Signal Fires & Raven Chains

- **Requirements:**
  High vantage point, Hands ≥ 25
- **Cost:**
  –5 Supply, –5 Hands
- **Time:**
  2–3 weeks
- **Tests:**
  - Navigation or Awareness to site stations
  - Beast Handling to manage birds or signal crews
- **Benefit:**
  - Increases regional awareness:
    - The Director must give early warning of large-scale threats approaching the Chapterhouse.
  - Once per month, may reduce the severity of a Threat Event by one step due to forewarning.

Inquisitorial Holding Cells

- **Requirements:**
  Structure Wear ≤ 50, Inquisition ≥ 40 present
- **Cost:**
  –10 Supply, –5 Hands
- **Time:**
  1 month
- **Tests:**
  - Inquisition to design containment procedures
  - Crafting: Smithing for restraints and fittings
- **Benefit:**
  - Provides a secure place to hold prisoners, heretics, or Choir defectors.
  - Interrogation-related Tests gain +10 when conducted here.
  - Risk: holding too many prisoners increases Spiritual Stress by +5 per month.

The Ashen Courtyard (Execution & Rite Ground)

- **Requirements:**
  Open courtyard or yard, Sanctity ≥ 35
- **Cost:**
  –5 Supply, –10 Sanctity
- **Time:**
  3 weeks
- **Tests:**
  - Faith or Exorcism & Banishment
  - Oratory if public rites are involved
- **Benefit:**
  - Once per month, may perform a **public rite or execution** that:
    - Reduces Spiritual Stress –10 **or**
    - Increases local fear/respect, granting +10 to Intimidation or Command in regional dealings.
  - Excessive use risks political or moral fallout.

Hidden Scriptorium Annex

- **Requirements:**
  Library Functional, Scholar ≥ 50 present
- **Cost:**
  –10 Supply, –5 Hands

- **Time:**
  1 month
- **Tests:**
  - Scholar
  - Scribing & Administration
- **Benefit:**
  - Grants Advantage on **one research-based Test per month**.
  - Once per campaign arc, allows discovery of a **lost doctrine, forgotten ritual, or suppressed historical truth**—often dangerous.

These upgrades are designed so that:

- **You cannot build everything**—choices define the Chapterhouse's identity.
- Every improvement creates **new narrative hooks**, not just bonuses.
- The Stronghold slowly becomes a mirror of the Ral: fortified, scarred, and burdened by memory.

Defensive Scenarios

When the Chapterhouse is attacked, treat the fortress as a **theatre of operations** rather than a static backdrop.

At minimum, define:

- The **enemy objective** (breach walls, seize relic, assassinate Companion).
- The **approach vector(s)** (gate, sally port, tunnels, Chapel roof, etc.).
- The **scale** (raid, siege, infiltration).

Siege as Extended Conflict

You can model a siege as a series of **major Clocks**:

- **Enemy Pressure Clock** (0–100)
- **Defender Resolve Clock** (0–100)

Each **phase** (day, night, or "scene") involves:

- Enemy actions (assault, sapping, bombardment, undercutting morale).
- Defender responses (counter-battery, sorties, strengthening wards, negotiation).

Each action calls for relevant Tests:

- **Warfare & Strategy** to judge priorities.
- **Command** to coordinate units.
- **Siege & Demolition**, **Shields**, **Archery**, etc., as needed.

On successes, you:

- Reduce Enemy Pressure or increase Defender Resolve.
  On failures, the inverse.

At set thresholds on Enemy Pressure (25/50/75), consequences fire:

- 25 – minor breach or inner fire.
- 50 – section of wall lost, Supply –10.
- 75 – enemies inside; immediate close-quarters scenes.

Stronghold **Upgrades** and **Facilities** grant bonuses or special gambits during these phases.

The Base as Character: Stress & Wear

Treat Structure Wear and Spiritual Stress as **long-term consequences** of neglect, damage, and dark miracles.

Structure Wear

Structure Wear increases when:

- You suffer siege Damage (failed defense Tests).
- You push your staff and Hands too hard without maintenance.
- You ignore minor collapses and cracks flagged by Companions.

Effects by band:

- **25+** – Some areas become unsafe; tests that rely on height, stonework, or heavy loads may suffer **–10** unless repairs are prioritized.
- **50+** – Certain facilities become **Damaged** automatically; the Director may rule sections unusable without major work.
- **75+** – The Chapterhouse is physically on the brink; one more severe event can render it partially or wholly untenable.

Spiritual Stress

Spiritual Stress increases when:

- Corruption among resident Rals is high and unaddressed.
- The Choir infiltrates or desecrates shrines.
- You store too many dangerous relics or necromantic artifacts without safeguards.

Effects by band:

- **25+** – Strange noises, dreams, and minor hauntings; Faith Tests in certain areas may suffer **–10**.
- **50+** – Relics occasionally misbehave; once per fortnight, the Director may impose a small negative twist on a miracle.
- **75+** – Ward failures, poltergeist-like phenomena, and risk that **Choir influences** manifest autonomously within the walls.

Bringing Stress down typically requires:

- Upgrades like **Crypt Purge**, **Sanctified Chapel**, and deliberate downtime actions (rites, exorcisms, purifications).

Part Three

Domain Actions: Keeping the House Alive

Ral Parthanus used to say, "You don't keep a fortress by winning battles. You keep it by **feeding it**." The Chapterhouse is not just stone and relics—it is **logistics and bodies**, wagons and grain, masons and scribes, refugees and levies who choose to stand under your banner instead of someone else's. Between missions, the Ral is not only a death-knight on a warhorse; they are the **steward of a starving fortress** trying to survive one more season.

That work lives in **Domain Actions**: deliberate, downtime-scale choices where the Ral turns their attention from the next fight to the state of the House itself. When you call for a **Resupply Run**, you're not rolling for a single bargaining scene—you're abstracting a month of haggling, convoy escorts, and quiet threats in market squares. When you choose **Recruitment / Settlement**, you're committing to sermons on the walls, promises in alehouses, and hard talks in burned-out farmsteads where people decide whether they trust an undead knight more than they fear the Choir.

Mechanically, Domain Actions are how you **push Supply and Hands back up** before the next calamity hits. A successful Resupply Run turns clever deals and safe caravans into +10 Supply. A well-led Recruitment drive turns terrified villagers, disbanded soldiers, or freed captives into +10 Hands. Lesser results still help—+5 here, +5 there—but often come with strings attached: obligations to merchants, offended lords, jittery new recruits. Failure means wasted time, bad rumors, or people deciding the Chapterhouse is just another doomed stone pile they don't want to die in.

Used well, Domain Actions make the stronghold feel like a **living front line**. Every time you mark +10 Supply, you can picture wagons creaking into the courtyard, Tolan shouting at porters, Caldrin demanding space for barrels. Every time Hands climbs, you see new faces at roll call—some hopeful, some desperate, some already half broken by the war. The Ral's choices in downtime decide whether there will be **enough food, enough tools, enough hands on the walls** when the next Choir banner appears on the horizon.

Short version: **by going out into the world and by spending downtime doing "Domain Actions."**

Let's nail down some explicit, repeatable ways to **raise Supply (SUP)** and **Hands (HND)** for the Chapterhouse, using the mechanics we've already set up.

Mission / Adventure Rewards

Any time the Ral completes a mission that obviously brings in goods, allies, or standing, the Director can award **SUP and HND directly**.

Supply from Missions

Examples:

- **Escorting caravans / breaking blockades**
  - Success: +5 to +15 **Supply** depending on scale.
  - Lesser Win: +5 Supply, but with a complication (enemy notice, new obligation).
  - Failure: 0 or even –5 Supply (lost cargo, reparations, bribes).
- **Looting or reclaiming enemy positions** (Choir shrines, forts, lairs)
  - Salvaged arms, armor, and coin can be abstracted to **+5–10 Supply**, plus specific items.
  - If you return captured gear to local allies, you can instead take part as **Hands** (see below).

- **Defending allied settlements**
    - Surviving villages often pay in kind:
        - Grain and goods → **Supply +5–10**
        - Promised labor later → **Hands +5** one or two sessions down the line (Director reminder).

Hands from Missions

"Hands" are bodies you can throw at work: garrison troops, laborers, specialists.

Examples:

- **Saving a village / refugees**
    - If you protect a settlement from undead or Choir raids, some folk will migrate to the Chapterhouse for safety:
        - +5 to +10 **Hands**, represented as families, militia, and workers.
- **Liberating captives**
    - Freeing prisoners from a Choir camp or corrupt lord:
        - +5 **Hands**, or more if you explicitly offer them a place in the House.
- **Overawing or earning loyalty from local forces**
    - Impressing a border garrison, outlaw band, or mercenary group:
        - Successful **Command / Intimidation / Persuasion** after a shared battle can recruit a portion:
            - +5–10 **Hands** (militia or veterans).

Mechanically, this is all **Director-facing**, but the pattern is:

> Complete a mission that plausibly yields people or stuff → Director assigns a SUP/HND gain.

Domain Actions in Downtime

Between adventures, the Ral can declare **Stronghold-scale actions** specifically to raise SUP or HND. Think of these as "mini-missions" that might or might not be played out fully.

"Resupply Run" (Raise Supply)

Once per downtime period, the Ral (or Tolan) can focus on **replenishing stores**.

Declare: "We focus on resupply this month."

Tests:

- Primary: **Stronghold Management** or **Trade & Appraisal**
- Support (optional): **Etiquette, Streetwise, Command, Oratory** depending on method

Outcome:

- **Success:**
    - Gain **+10 Supply** (trade deals, better prices, tax relief, efficient purchasing).
- **Lesser Win:**
    - Gain **+5 Supply**, but:
        - You owe a favor, **or**
        - A small future complication (e.g., merchant tied to shady source).
- **Failure:**
    - Little or no gain (0 to +2), and there may be a small cost:

- –5 Sanctity (if you pawnbroked something sacred), **or**
- An Event roll with Disadvantage (bad trade, offended partner).

You can frame this in play as:

- Sending Tolan and a caravan to a trade city.
- Hosting a market within the Chapterhouse.
- Collecting dues from vassal lands.

"Recruitment / Settlement" (Raise Hands)

Once per downtime, the Ral can focus on **bringing in more people**.

Declare: "We focus on recruitment and settlement this month."

Tests:

- Primary: **Command, Oratory, Persuasion** (rallying people, making the case).
- Support: **Faith, Theology, Lore: Kingdoms, Streetwise** (for framing, alliances, and messaging).

Outcome:

- **Success:**
  - Gain +**10 Hands** (new militia, laborers, artisans, or relocated families).
- **Lesser Win:**
  - Gain +**5 Hands**, but:
    - They're shaky (morale issues, need extra discipline),
    - Or they draw a rival's attention (someone is losing subjects to you).
- **Failure:**
  - No net gain; you may even lose **Hands –5** to desertion or fear, if rumors about the House go badly.

In-fiction this might be:

- Recruiting border farmers into a fortified hamlet under your walls.
- Offering sanctuary to plague-survivors.
- Negotiating with a noble for a permanent levy stationed at your House.

Events That Boost Supply / Hands

The **Fortnightly Event Table** already has hooks that raise Assets (e.g., "Pilgrim Donation," "Merchant Train at the Gate," "Draft of Laborers," "Unexpected Windfall").

You can treat those as **rare bursts**:

- If the Ral engages well (good skill Tests, decent choices), they get:
  - **Supply +5–10**, **Hands +5–10**, or both.
- If they ignore or mishandle events, they get nothing or face losses.

So: events are your **organic**, story-driven source of Assets; Domain actions are your **intentional**, repeatable source.

Conversions & Trade-Offs

Finally, the Ral can sometimes **convert one Asset into another**, or spend short-term power to stabilize long-term assets.

Examples (Director tools):

- **Trade Sanctity for Supply**
  - Selling/cutting relic fragments, leasing shrine rights, or allowing relic viewing:

        - Spend –5 Sanctity → Gain +10 Supply, **plus** potential spiritual consequences later.
- **Spend Hands to Gain Supply**
    - Sending workers out as for-hire labor or mercenaries:
        - Spend –5 Hands → Gain +10 Supply, but you temporarily weaken your garrison.
- **Spend Supply to Attract Hands**
    - Offering high pay and generous rations:
        - Spend –10 Supply → Gain +5–10 Hands, especially in times of famine.

These should always be **fiction-first deals**, not casual flipping. The Order is in a war economy; every conversion has a narrative cost.

In Short

A Ral increases **Supplies** and **Hands** by:

1. **Mission Results** – victories that plausibly bring in goods or people.
2. **Domain Downtime Actions** – "Resupply Run" and "Recruitment/Settlement" maneuvers with clear tests and rewards.
3. **Events** – reacting well to Fortnightly Events that offer donations, labor, and refugees.
4. **Hard Trade-Offs** – occasionally converting Sanctity ↔ Supply ↔ Hands with story-appropriate costs.

Part Four

Stronghold Sanctity

Sanctity goes up when the Chapterhouse is treated like a living monastery/fortress, not just a barracks. Mechanically, it improves through specific actions, upgrades, and story outcomes—never "by default over time."

Here's how it works in the framework we've been building:

What Sanctity *Is* (Quick Reminder)

For the Chapterhouse, Sanctity is:

- The spiritual integrity of the place (saintly legacy, prayers, rites, relics).
- Its resistance to Choir influence and ambient Corruption.
- A base-wide bonus engine for:
    - Faith workings,
    - Corruption/Humanity checks,
    - Defenses vs undead or star-taint events.

Mechanically, you've been treating it like a 0–100 Asset track, alongside Supply and Hands.

Core Ways Sanctity Improves

A) Upgrades & Facilities

Many Stronghold upgrades explicitly require a minimum Sanctity and/or increase it when completed.

Examples:

- Sanctified Chapel / Great Chapel of Ral
    - Requirements: modest Sanctity already, some Hands & Supply.
    - On completion: Sanctity +10–15.
    - Effect: Faith rolls in the Chapterhouse gain +10; Corruption Events roll at Disadvantage.
- Reliquary Vault / Restored Reliquary
    - Returning lost saint-bones, Ral relics, or holy banners:
    - On completion or when a major relic is placed: Sanctity +5–10 each.
- Pilgrim Shrine or Hospice Wing
    - Shelter for the living, not just a barracks for the dead.
    - If you use it actively (sheltering refugees, tending wounded): Sanctity incrementally rises (+2–5 at milestones).

Any future upgrade that:

- fortifies holy spaces,
- purifies existing chapels,
- or enshrines Ral martyrs

...should list a Sanctity increase in its Benefit line.

Design rule of thumb:
If the upgrade makes the fortress feel more like a living monastery/saintly site, it should boost Sanctity.
If it's just walls, steel, or siege engines, it shouldn't.

B) Downtime Actions at the Chapterhouse

During Downtime, Protagonists can choose activities that explicitly push Sanctity upward.

Good fits:

- Penance & Rites
    - Ral spends downtime in prayer, fasts, confessions, reconsecrating bloodied spaces.
    - On a successful Faith/Theology test:
        - Minor: Sanctity +1–2 (quiet, routine upkeep).
        - Major rite after a big victory: Sanctity +3–5.
- Tend the Dead
    - Ensuring proper burial/cremation, removing Choir sigils from corpses, saying the words for nameless dead.
    - Good Healing/Faith/Medicine/Chirurgery results on mass graves or corpse-pits can grant small Sanctity bumps.
- Cleanse Tainted Spaces
    - Ritual cleaning of crypts, cells, and walls previously used by Choir:
    - Clocks + Tests (Faith, Theology, Sorcery for counter-warding).
    - On completion: Sanctity gain proportional to how bad it was (+3–10).

Key point:
Sanctity does *not* passively regenerate. It moves when the Ral *chooses* to invest downtime and resources in holy maintenance.

C) Mission Outcomes & Story Victories

Certain adventure results should explicitly feed back into Sanctity:

Good sources:

- Recovering or Defending Relics
    - Save a saint's skull from a Choir node: Sanctity +5 when installed properly.
    - Prevent relic theft or desecration: +2–3.
- Saving Communities from Choir
    - Freeing a village from a node or purge, then offering them haven or protection:
        - If they turn to the Chapterhouse with trust, Sanctity rises (+2–5).
        - If they fall to fear and hate, there's no gain—or even a loss.
- Destroying Nodes & Major Choir Sites
    - Tearing down a node and cleansing it with Faith rather than leaving a spiritual vacuum:
        - Sanctity +5–10, often with a one-time Faith boon.
- Martyrdom & Sacrifice
    - If a Ral or major Companion dies in defense of the Chapterhouse or under its banner *and* is interred with honor:
        - Their memory can become a Sanctity anchor: +3–8, depending on story weight.

How Sanctity *Doesn't* Improve

- Not by idle time:
  Months passing alone do nothing. Sanctity is spiritual tension; without constant tending, it usually falls, not rises, in this world.
- Not by purely martial upgrades:
  Walls, murder-holes, and forges don't touch

Sanctity unless tied to rites or symbols (e.g., warded gate, reliquary built into the barbican).

- Not by hidden actions:
  If something is secret, shameful, or Choir-aligned (even if "for the greater good"), it either:
    - gives no Sanctity benefit, or
    - quietly erodes Sanctity later when consequences surface.

Mechanical Uses (Why Players Care)

Sanctity isn't just a narrative gauge; it pays off at the table:

You can lean on:

- Global Base Modifiers
    - High Sanctity (e.g., 60+):
        - Faith Tests within the Chapterhouse: +10.
        - Sorcery mishap/Corruption rolls in the Chapterhouse: –10 or Disadvantage.
        - Undead assaulting the walls: –10 to their morale/fear checks, maybe –10 to certain attack/Defense rolls.
- Event & Upkeep Rolls
    - Fortnightly Stronghold Event rolls:
        - Higher Sanctity = better result floors, fewer catastrophic events, more "good omen" or NPC relationship events.
    - Corruption Events at Base:
        - High Sanctity offers a buffer: roll twice, take better; or apply –10/–20 to severity.
- Gating Content
    - Some Upgrades or Rites require Sanctity ≥ X.
    - Certain Boons, Faith spells, or NPC Companions might only be unlocked once Sanctity crosses a threshold.

Chapterhouse Network (If/When You Have Multiple Bases)

If you later allow multiple Chapterhouses:

- Each has its own Sanctity track.
- The "mother" Chapterhouse's Sanctity might:
    - act as a soft cap for outposts (they can't exceed it), or
    - provide small bonuses on founding (e.g., start new chapterhouses at Sanctity = mother's Sanctity ÷ 2, rounded down).

But the core stays:

> Sanctity improves when the Ral treats the Chapterhouse as a sacred duty, not just a fortress.

Part Five

Secondary Companions

NPC Relationships & Base Life

> "Walls do not keep the Chapterhouse alive. People do. Even the dead ones."
> — Old Ral saying

Between missions, the Chapterhouse is where the campaign **breathes**:

- Training, crafting, quarrels, and confessions.
- Names that the Ral will remember when they die again.
- Quiet moments where nothing is swinging at your head—unless it is a thrown tankard.

This chapter gives you:

- A view of day-to-day life,
- Rules for relationship progression,
- And detailed **Secondary Companions** who inhabit the stronghold.

Downtime at the Chapterhouse

Each downtime period (a few days to a few weeks) allows the Protagonist to choose **home-base activities**:

- **Train** – Improve Skills, practice with mounts, spar, study.
- **Craft** – Work in the forge, lab, scriptorium; create gear, potions, tools.
- **Penance & Rites** – Engage in Corruption-reducing practices.
- **Relationships** – Spend time with Secondary Companions; support or confront them.
- **Domain Work** – Oversee Upgrades, negotiate with suppliers, drill garrison.

Mechanically, you treat each focus as:

- 1–3 key **Tests** (Skills, sometimes opposed),
- With possible **Clocks** to track long projects (e.g., "Wall Repairs 0–100").

Relationships tie into most of these activities.

Secondary Companions of the Chapterhouse

Secondary Companions are **recurring NPCs** who inhabit the base:

- They offer services and flavor by default.

- With time and trust, the Ral can **hire** them as traveling Companions on specific missions.
- Their survival and loyalties matter; they are the face of your stronghold.

Each entry below includes:

- Role and description
- Personality and secret pressures
- Mechanical notes (what they do for the stronghold, and as Companions)

You can adjust Skills to match your table's values.

Master Helvar Stonebrand, Relic-Smith of the Broken Sun

Role: Relic-Smith and armorer of the Order.
Description: A thick-set man in middle years, with burnt hands, missing eyebrows, and a face scored by tiny scars where sparks scarred and healed. His left leg is twisted from an old collapse; he walks with a heavy iron crutch—and curses the stone every time.

Helvar treats relics like difficult children. He speaks to blades, growls at armor, and mutters apologies when he has to rework a saint-forged edge for an undead knight's grip.

Personality:

- Gruff, impatient, easily angered by negligence ("You left this in the rain?").
- Secretly sentimental about relics; remembers where each came from.
- Deeply conflicted about fitting holy weapons to undead hands.

Mechanical Role (at the Stronghold):

- While Helvar is loyal and working:
    - All **Crafting: Smithing** Tests made in the Chapterhouse gain **+10**.
    - Once per month, he can oversee one **"Relic Tempering" project**, granting a unique minor property to a weapon or armor piece (Director-defined, e.g., +10 vs undead, or once-per-session Faith-aligned effect).

As a Traveling Companion:

- He is slow and hates leaving his forge, but may accompany a mission tied to a **lost relic**.
- Provide **advantage** on field repairs, and occasional emergency relic-use rulings when things go sideways.

Sister Maera of the Ashen Veil, House Canon & Confessor

Role: Primary theologian, confessor, and reluctant liaison to local clergy.
Description: Maera wears simple grey robes and an iron veil that covers most of her face—by choice, not doctrine. Her hands are tattooed with tiny script: prayers, fragments of doctrine, and lines she has crossed out with scars where she believes the Church lied.

Her gaze through the veil feels like being weighed.

Personality:

- Quiet, intense, rarely smiles.
- Values **truth over comfort**; will not lie to reassure.
- Haunted by the question of whether the Order is a necessary sin or a holy burden.

Mechanical Role (at the Stronghold):

- While Maera is present and cooperative:
    - **Faith** and **Theology** Tests made in the Chapel gain **+10**.

    - Once per fortnight, she can perform or supervise **Penance Rites**, allowing the Ral to attempt Corruption reduction.
- Her approval or disapproval may directly affect **Sanctity (SCT)** through her reports to higher authorities.

As a Traveling Companion:

- She accompanies missions involving **relics, Choir shrines, or theological crises**.
- Grants **+10 to Faith/Theology** where she is actively aiding, but may also prompt difficult moral choices.

"Gravesquire" Tolan Mere, Quartermaster & Graveborn Squire

Role: Quartermaster, supply officer, and "gravesquire"—a living squire who has bound himself to serve undead knights.
Description: Tolan is wiry, sharp-eyed, with ink stains on his fingers and constantly worried creases at the corners of his mouth. He wears a squire's tabard over a padded jack, belts overly full of keys, tally sticks, and a weighted abacus-chain.

He cracks jokes when anxious, which is almost always.

Personality:

- Pragmatic, anxious, and stubbornly loyal.
- Keeps careful mental tallies of who owes favors and who pays debts.
- Secret fear: that he will be offered the Rite of Ral and that he will not be able to say no.

Mechanical Role (at the Stronghold):

- While Tolan is working and not broken by stress:
    - **Stronghold Management** and **Trade & Appraisal** Tests gain **+10** when they involve supplies, pay, and provisioning.
    - Once per fortnight, he can convert **information** into **Assets**, turning a successful negotiation or small side-job into **+5 Supply** or **+5 Hands**.

As a Traveling Companion:

- He is ideal for logistics-heavy missions (escorts, long roads, multi-party operations).
- Provides small, persistent bonuses to **Navigation**, **Wilderness Survival**, and any **Upkeep/Provision** tasks on the road.

Alenna Crow-Eye, Whispering Scout of the Outer Wall

Role: Chief scout and handler of rooftop watchers and wall runners.
Description: A lean woman with a pale, windburnt face and dark hair braided short. One eye is milky white; the other is sharp and restless. Crows tend to roost near her when she stands still too long.

She keeps to parapets and crenellations; most of her conversations happen with her back against the sky.

Personality:

- Taciturn, blunt, uncomfortable indoors.
- Deeply suspicious of everyone who wears a robe.
- Honest in a way that can hurt: she tells you how many will die if you choose a plan.

Mechanical Role (at the Stronghold):

- While Alenna is active:
    - **Streetwise**, **Tracking**, and **Stealthcraft** related to approaches to

the Chapterhouse gain **+10** (better patrols, better intel).

- Once per fortnight, she can generate a **Warning**: the Director must make any surprise assault on the Chapterhouse **less surprising** (fewer penalties, or early alert).

As a Traveling Companion:

- Ideal for recon-heavy missions.
- Grants **+10** to the party's first Stealthcraft or Tracking Test each adventure, representing her pre-scouting and guidance.

Brother Caldrin Soothand, Alchemist of Bitter Mercy

Role: House alchemist, plague-fighter, and maker of uncomfortable solutions.
Description: Caldrin's skin is stained at the fingertips and along his forearms with purples and yellows from reagents. He coughs often, a dry, burned sound. His hair is shaved to stubble to avoid "stray ignition."

He believes in saving lives through **any means**; the line between medicine and weapon is very thin in his lab.

Personality:

- Cheerful in a morbid way, always half apologizing to his ingredients.
- Strong ethical backbone but open to appalling choices if they save more overall.
- Secretly terrified of becoming so pragmatic he no longer sees the horror.

Mechanical Role (at the Stronghold):

- While Caldrin is working:
  - **Alchemy** and **Herbalism** Tests in the lab gain **+10**.
- Once per month, he can produce:
  - A batch of **corpse-fire oil** (bonus damage vs undead or easier corpse disposal),
  - Or a **plague buffer** kit, granting Advantage to **Medicine/Chirurgery** and **Endure Hardship** Tests linked to disease outbreaks.

As a Traveling Companion:

- Crucial for plague missions, poison investigations, and contamination zones.
- Provides emergency concoctions and analysis in the field.

Keeper Vos, Crypt-Warden of the Lower Vaults

Role: Guardian of the crypts, ossuaries, and forgotten levels beneath the Chapterhouse.
Description: Tall, thin, wrapped in layered robes that smell of dust and incense. His head is shaved; tattoos of bone-lines trace his scalp and neck. His voice is soft and unhurried.

It is unknown whether Vos is technically living or some controlled undead state sanctioned by the Order.

Personality:

- Calm, patient, speaks to the dead as if they are simply in the next room.
- Loyal to the House more than any individual Ral.
- His memory for who is buried where (and why) borders on the unnatural.

Mechanical Role (at the Stronghold):

- While Vos is present and active:

- **Gravecraft**, **Corpses & Remains**, and **Necromantic Anatomy** Tests dealing with the crypts gain **+10**.
- Once per month, he may reveal a **hidden passage, subcrypt, or secret burial**, providing a new adventure hook or tactical option.

As a Traveling Companion:

- Rarely leaves the House; if he does, it is for matters of **grave importance** (literally).
- Offers deep expertise on any site tied to ancient dead or ossuary structures.

Relationship Tiers & Advancement

For each Secondary Companion, track a simple **Relationship Tier**:

- **Tier 0 – Wary**: They do their duty, but keep distance.
- **Tier 1 – Professional**: Mutual respect; minor favors exchanged.
- **Tier 2 – Trusted**: They volunteer extra effort, share worries, ask for help.
- **Tier 3 – Bound**: They tie their fate to the Ral; will follow into extreme peril.

Advancement usually requires:

- **Downtime scenes** – genuine conversations or shared work.
- **Actions** – defending them, backing their judgment, or helping with personal crises.
- Occasional **Tests** (Persuasion, Insight, Faith, Command) when the relationship is at an inflection point.

As Tiers increase, you may:

- Unlock **discounts** or bonuses on relevant Tests.
- Gain access to **personal quests** (e.g., Helvar's missing relic-blade; Maera's doctrinal trial).
- Invite them as **traveling Companions** more freely.

Conversely, betrayal or neglect can **drop tiers**—sometimes sharply.

See **Book 3: Companion Relationship Development** for more on this.

Part Six

Fortnightly Event Table (1–50)

Every **in-game fortnight** (roughly twice per game month), the Director may roll on the following table to see what stirs within or around the Chapterhouse.

- Roll **1d100**, **round down** (i.e., 1–2 = 1, 3–4 = 2, etc.), to determine a result from **1–50**.
- Many entries are **flavor-only** unless the Protagonist chooses to pursue them.

Each entry is written as:

[Category] d50: Event Description (sample mechanical hook)

Categories (for your own tracking, not rules):

- [Flavor] – color, no direct mechanical effect unless leveraged.
- [Asset] – affects Supply/Hands/Sanctity.
- [Quest] – adventure hook.
- [Companion] – relationship or hiring opportunity.
- [Threat] – defensive/reactive situation.

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1. **[Flavor] Silent Bells**
   The Chapterhouse bells ring once at midnight with no-one in the tower.
   - If investigated with **Investigation** or **Faith**, may reveal a small omen or name connected to an upcoming threat.
2. **[Asset] Spoiled Stores**
   Vermin or rot takes hold in a section of pantry.
   - Lose **–5 Supply**, or succeed at **Wilderness Survival / Stronghold Management** to reduce the loss to –2.
3. **[Quest] Whispered Map Fragment**
   Old tomes in the Library crack open, revealing a marginal map to a forgotten outpost.
   - Research with **Scholar** grants a solid adventure site (Director details).
4. **[Companion] A New Squire Candidate**
   A frightened youth arrives, begging to serve as gravesquire.
   - Passing **Insight** and **Command/Persuasion** Tests may recruit them, increasing **Hands +5** and potentially adding a future Secondary Companion.
5. **[Threat] Choir Graffiti**
   Choir sigils appear overnight on an outer wall.
   - Remove with **Wardcraft / Faith** or suffer **Spiritual Stress +5** and minor public panic.
6. **[Flavor] Ghost on the Ramparts**
   Multiple guards report seeing the same dead knight walking the walls.
   - If confronted, may offer cryptic advice about a future assault.
7. **[Asset] Unexpected Tithe**
   A nearby village sends an unsought wagon of grain and tools.
   - Gain **+5–10 Supply**, but their reason (fear, gratitude, guilt) may hint at local trouble.
8. **[Quest] Missing Patrol**
   One of Alenna's patrols fails to return.
   - Following up leads to a small-to-medium external mission; ignoring it increases **Spiritual Stress +5** (unburied dead).

9. **[Companion] Traveling Chirurgeon**
   A skilled but world-weary surgeon arrives, seeking refuge.
   - Recruit with **Persuasion** / **Trade & Appraisal**, gaining **Medicine/Chirurgery support** and possibly a new hireable Companion.
10. **[Threat] Internal Sabotage**
    Tools misplaced, doors jammed, minor fires. Someone inside is working against you.
    - Series of **Investigation/Insight** Tests can uncover a traitor; failure raises **Structure Wear +5** or **Spiritual Stress +5**.
11. **[Flavor] Bones Singing in the Crypt**
    Keeper Vos reports a faint humming in certain skull rows.
    - No immediate effect; may foreshadow necromantic disturbances.
12. **[Asset] Merchant Train at the Gate**
    Traders bring weapons, cloth, salt; wary of undead knights.
    - With **Trade & Appraisal** / **Etiquette**, you can gain **+10 Supply** or convert coin into a small Upgrade discount.
13. **[Quest] Plague Sign in a Nearby Hamlet**
    Caldrin identifies marks of sickness.
    - Investigate to prevent **Hands –10** in a later event; ignore and risk plague spreading to your staff.
14. **[Companion] Disgraced Knight Seeks the Rite**
    A broken, living knight begs to become a Ral.
    - Accepting may add a powerful but troubled ally and future internal story; refusing may create resentment or a future antagonist.
15. **[Threat] Choir Scout Sign**
    Alenna's crows bring trinkets marked with Choir sigils.
    - Alert the garrison; prepare for a small-scale raid or increased future attack risk.
16. **[Flavor] Children's Laughter in Empty Halls**
    Staff hear phantom laughing from an unused dormitory.
    - Pure flavor, or a subtle sign of Spiritual Stress creeping upward.
17. **[Asset] Pilgrim Donation**
    A procession of pilgrims offers small coins and relic fragments.
    - Gain **+5 Sanctity** and possible relic rumors if treated kindly; abusing them damages **Sanctity** later.
18. **[Quest] Old Writ of Claim**
    Scribing uncovers documents naming your Chapterhouse as inheritor of another ruined site.
    - Provides legal leverage for a **reclamation mission**.
19. **[Companion] Runaway Choir Acolyte**
    A young defector from the Choir seeks sanctuary.
    - With **Inquisition** and **Insight**, you can gain intel; mishandling them risks a spy within.
20. **[Threat] Minor Undead Uprising in the Crypts**
    A handful of corpses stir.
    - Handle with **Gravecraft** / **Exorcism** Tests; failure raises **Spiritual Stress +10** and may injure Hands.

21. **[Flavor] Relic Weeps Blood**
One of Helvar's relic pieces secretes a dark fluid.
    - Could foreshadow a specific enemy, or be used as a tool if studied.
22. **[Asset] Draft of Laborers**
Authority sends conscript workers to "assist."
    - Increase **Hands +10**, but their morale is low; you must use **Command/Oratory** to avoid discipline problems.
23. **[Quest] Conflicting Doctrinal Letters**
Maera receives conflicting orders from rival bishops.
    - Choosing sides creates a new political arc and possible Hunt/Trial mission.
24. **[Companion] Old Friend at the Gate**
A mortal from the Ral's living past arrives.
    - Offers potential Relationship content, a personal quest, or emotional complication.
25. **[Threat] Harrowing Dream Wave**
Many in the House suffer the same nightmare.
    - **Weathering the Choir** isn't a skill anymore, but **Presence / Faith / Theology** Tests may mitigate lingering penalties to Resolve or add narrative clues.
26. **[Flavor] Unseasonal Fog**
The Chapterhouse is shrouded in thick fog for days.
    - Increases tension; if the Director wishes, ambushes or misfires can be more common this fortnight.
27. **[Asset] Noble Patron's Gift**
A local lord sends fine armor or a banner.
    - **+5 Supply** and a social tie; rejecting it offends them and may generate a rival later.
28. **[Quest] Rumors of a Choir Ritual Site**
Streetwise or scouts bring word of a recurring gathering.
    - Treat as a portable adventure hook; investigating could break a cell or be a trap.
29. **[Companion] Deserting Militia**
Half-starved militia ask to join your garrison.
    - Accept with **Command/Intimidation** and gain **Hands +5–10**; fail to manage them and discipline issues arise.
30. **[Threat] Supply Interdiction**
Supply routes are harassed; merchants stop coming.
    - Lose **–10 Supply** unless you address it via a small adventure or domain maneuver.
31. **[Flavor] Strange Lights Above the Bell-Tower**
Staff see cold lights circling the highest point.
    - May foreshadow celestial or Choir manifestations.
32. **[Asset] Hidden Cache Discovered**
Repairs uncover a sealed chest of old gear.
    - Gain **+5 Supply** and one minor unique item (Director-design).
33. **[Quest] Disappearing Graves**
Some graves in the outer cemetery are empty where they should not be.
    - Investigate or face future ambushes by specific undead former occupants.

34. **[Companion] Traveling Bard or Chronicler**
A storyteller requests lodging "to write what has not yet been forgotten."
    - Can boost morale, improve **Oratory/Persuasion** for a while, and record the Ral's deeds—if not turned into a liability.
35. **[Threat] Internal Riot**
Laborers, servants, or low-ranked guards protest conditions or fear of undead.
    - Resolve with **Oratory / Persuasion / Intimidation**; failure loses **Hands –5** and may raise **Spiritual Stress +5** (resentful living presence).
36. **[Flavor] Ral's Own Mount Acts Strange**
The undead war-horse snorts at empty corners, refuses familiar paths.
    - Could be pure flavor, or hint at unseen presences or structural issues.
37. **[Asset] Relic Auction Invitation**
Word arrives of a dubious auction of "holy items" nearby.
    - Attending could shift **Sanctity/Supply**, and reveal counterfeiters or Choir-operated black markets.
38. **[Quest] Boundary Dispute**
Neighboring powers claim a section of land or an old watchtower.
    - Could be handled via diplomacy (Social focused session) or arms.
39. **Companion] Orphaned Child of the War**
A war orphan finds their way into the House kitchens.
    - They can become a long-term squire, informant, or emotional anchor.
40. **[Threat] Choir Saboteur Exposed**
A long-trusted staff member is revealed as a Choir agent.
    - Dealing with them is a mixture of **Inquisition/Insight/Intimidation**; consequences can echo through many relationships.
41. **[Flavor] Snow or Ash Out of Season**
The Chapterhouse grounds are briefly dusted with white that is not snow.
    - May suggest a shift in the larger metaphysical weather.
42. **[Asset] Unexpected Windfall from Trade**
Tolan returns from a trip with better-than-expected profits.
    - Gain **+10 Supply**, and a possible new trade contact.
43. **[Quest] Lost Ral's Journal**
A hidden compartment yields a long-dead Ral's diary.
    - Inside: regrets, maps, and a partially complete quest you can now finish.
44. **[Companion] Penitent Choir Soldier**
A captured Choir soldier begs to fight for you instead.
    - Could become a dangerous but useful hire; high **Intimidation/Insight/Command** stakes.
45. **[Threat] Beast Attack**
Corrupted beasts (wolves, boars, birds) test the walls.
    - Minor siege/battle; failure can raise Structure Wear and lower Hands.
46. **[Flavor] Old Song Returns to the Halls**
Someone starts humming a marching song

from long before; many staff pick it up without knowing why.

    - Pure flavor, or a sign that the Chapterhouse remembers old Rals.

47. **[Asset] Donation from Anonymous Protector**
    A sealed chest appears in the courtyard overnight.

    - **+5 Supply** and +5 Sanctity—or a subtle trap if you choose to inspect carelessly.

48. **[Quest] Summons from High Authority**
    Letter demands the Ral or Maera attend a synod, council, or war council.

    - Leads to a political and moral mission; ignoring it has consequences.

49. **[Companion] Wandering Hermit-Seer**
    An old hermit appears at your gate, muttering prophecy.

    - If entertained and not mocked, they can offer **one clear omen** about a future choice, and potentially become an ongoing resource.

50. **[Threat] Full Choir Strike**
    The Choir launches a coordinated assault: infiltrators, rituals, external attackers.

    - This is a major event; run a full siege/defense arc. Success may grant substantial **Asset** rewards and story advancement; failure can cripple or end the Chapterhouse as you know it.

Part Seven

Stronghold Upkeep

A fortress is a hungry thing.

Every **game month** (two fortnights), the Chapterhouse must be **kept**:

- Walls inspected,
- Staff paid or fed,
- Chapels maintained,
- Crypts watched.

Upkeep is meant to be **simple but sharp**: ignore it and your base slowly erodes.

Monthly Upkeep Procedure

1. **Calculate Baseline Cost**
    - **Supply:** –5 to –10 (food, materials, stipends)
    - **Hands:** 0 (no automatic loss)
    - **Sanctity:** –2 to –5 (candles, incense, relic care, clergy support)

    Adjust these numbers based on:

    - Size of garrison
    - Level of current Upgrades
    - Ongoing siege or crisis (double costs)
2. **Stronghold Upkeep Test**

    Have the Ral (or Tolan) make a **Stronghold Management** Test, with support from **Trade & Appraisal** or **Command**.

    - **Success:**
        - Pay the **lower** end of base costs (e.g., Supply –5, Sanctity –2).
    - **Lesser Win / Mixed:**
        - Pay the normal mid-range (e.g., Supply –7, Sanctity –3), and choose one:
            - Structure Wear +5, **or** Spiritual Stress +5.
    - **Failure:**
        - Pay the **higher** end (Supply –10, Sanctity –5).
        - Also increase either Structure Wear or Spiritual Stress by +10 (Director's choice).
3. **Shortfalls**

    If Supply or Sanctity would drop below 0:

    - You can attempt an additional **Command/Oratory** Test to **beg, bully, or squeeze** extra from staff or locals.
    - Success: reduce the shortfall (treat as if you had 0, but morale takes a hit—maybe **Hands –5**).
    - Failure: you enter the new month under **Scarcity Conditions**:
        - All future Upkeep Tests have **–10** until you resolve the crisis.
        - Related Staff may desert, fall sick, or turn hostile; roll an Event next fortnight with Disadvantage.

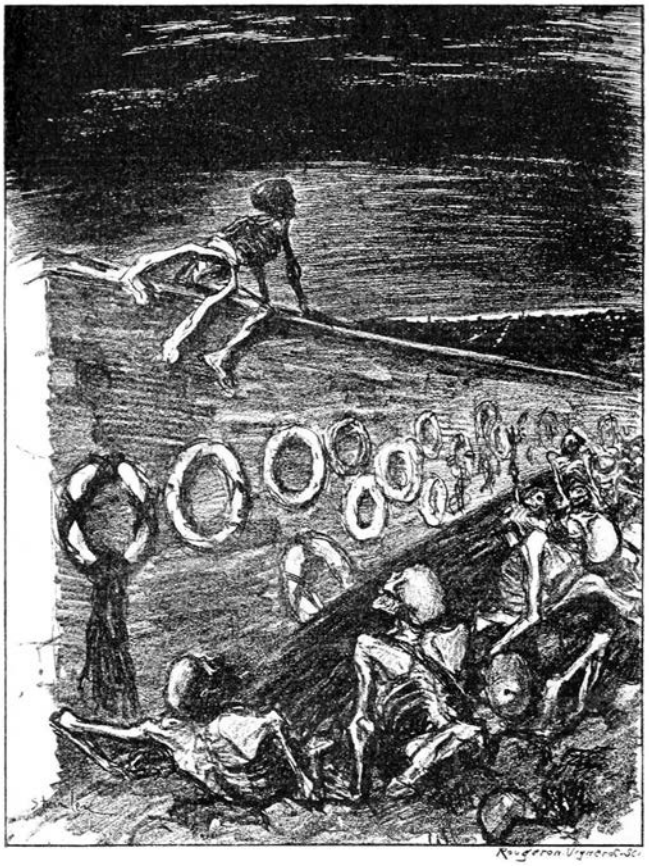
Strongholds in *The Order of Ral* are written to be:

- A **staging ground** for missions,
- A **mirror** of the Ral's own Corruption and struggles,

- And a **stake** that makes every strategic choice matter.

Every stone the Ral saves, every Companion they keep alive, and every wall they repair is a statement:

> "The world is not yet completely
> Athrakar's.
> Not while this House stands."



Part Eight

THE CHAPTERHOUSE OF RAL — STRONGHOLD SHEET

"This stone is my oath made visible."

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1. IDENTITY

Name of Chapterhouse: _____

Location Tags (1–2):
☐ Borderland Ruin
☐ City Undercroft
☐ Mountain Redoubt
☐ River Fort
☐ Cliffside Monastery
☐ Fortress-Temple
☐ Other: _____

Starting State (pick/blend):
☐ Crumbling (weak structure)
☐ Besieged (active threats)
☐ Mostly Abandoned (few staff)

Oath to the House (short phrase):
"_____"

---

2. ASSET POOLS (0–100)

Record in steps of 5 or 10 as needed.

Supply (SUP) – food, coin, mundane gear, trade value.
Current: _____ / 100

Hands (HND) – staff, laborers, militia, artisans.
Current: _____ / 100

Sanctity (SCT) – relics, shrines, wards, spiritual favor.
Current: _____ / 100

---

3. WEAR & STRESS (0–100)

Structure Wear – physical damage, neglect, collapses.
0–24: hairline cracks 25–49: weak sections
50–74: serious breaches 75–100: brink of failure

Current: _____ / 100

Spiritual Stress – hauntings, desecration, Choir seepage.
0–24: unease 25–49: hauntings
50–74: relic silence 75–100: star-tainted

Current: _____ / 100

---

4. FACILITIES (CIRCLE ONE PER LINE)

Mark each as:
A = Absent D = Damaged F = Functional E = Enhanced

Armory ..... A / D / F / E
Reliquary ..... A / D / F / E
Infirmary ..... A / D / F / E
Crypts ..... A / D / F / E
Library ..... A / D / F / E
Shrine / Chapel ..... A / D / F / E
Stables (War-Horses) A / D / F / E
Alchemical Lab ..... A / D / F / E
Scriptorium ..... A / D / F / E
Gate Wards / Kill-Zone A / D / F / E
Other: _____ A / D / F / E
Other: _____ A / D / F / E

Notes (special quirks, hooks, hidden levels):

---

5. CURRENT UPGRADES

List major completed upgrades & their main effects.

1. _____
   Effect: _____
2. _____
   Effect: _____
3. _____
   Effect: _____
4. _____
   Effect: _____

(Use back of sheet or notes for more.)

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6. SECONDARY COMPANIONS (HOUSE NPCs)

Name	Role	Relationship Tier (0–3)	Notes
_____	_____	0 / 1 / 2 / 3	_____
_____	_____	0 / 1 / 2 / 3	_____
_____	_____	0 / 1 / 2 / 3	_____
_____	_____	0 / 1 / 2 / 3	_____
_____	_____	0 / 1 / 2 / 3	_____
_____	_____	0 / 1 / 2 / 3	_____

(Examples: Helvar Stonebrand – Relic-Smith; Sister Maera – Confessor; Tolan Mere – Gravesquire; Alenna Crow-Eye – Scout; Brother Caldrin – Alchemist; Keeper Vos – Crypt-Warden.)

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7. STRONGHOLD UPKEEP (MONTHLY)

Base Monthly Cost (adjust per house size):

- Supply: –5 to –10
- Sanctity: –2 to –5

Stronghold Upkeep Test:
Skill: **Stronghold Management** (with Trade & Appraisal / Command assist)

- **Success:** pay lower cost (SUP –5, SCT –2).
- **Lesser Win:** pay normal (e.g., SUP –7, SCT –3) **and** choose:
  - Structure Wear +5 **or** Spiritual Stress +5.
- **Failure:** pay higher (SUP –10, SCT –5) **and**
  - Structure Wear +10 **or** Spiritual Stress +10 (Director's choice).

If Supply or Sanctity would drop below 0, note **Scarcity** and apply penalties until resolved.

Scarcity Notes:

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8. FORTNIGHTLY EVENTS (1d100, ÷2, ROUND DOWN → 1–50)

Every in-game fortnight, the Director may roll once:

- Result: _____ (from d100 → 1–50)
- Event: _____
- Outcome / Notes: _____

Use margins or back for logging event history. Over time, this becomes the **chronicle of the House**—which raids it weathered, who arrived at the gate, and what the Ral chose to ignore.

Chapter 3: Companions of the Damned

"A Ral rides alone into the dark.
But if they ride back alone every time, the House is already dying."
— Sister Maera of the Ashen Veil

In truth, even a death-knight cannot hold a crumbling world together by themselves. Steel and sorcery may carve a path through undead ranks and Choir rites, but they cannot mend tack, sew flesh, carry news, or argue with a frightened innkeeper without turning every scene into a threat. The Order learned early that if the Rals were to last even a few years in this Broken Age, they would need something more fragile and more stubborn than iron: other people.

Companions gather around a Ral the way crows gather around a battlefield, but for reasons more complicated than hunger. Some come for coin, because Choir rule has shattered every honest trade and a death-knight's shadow is the only safety they can find. Some come for faith, convinced that serving the Order is the last righteous work left in the world. Some come for guilt, unable to live with what they have done or failed to do, and seeing in the Ral a walking, armored chance at penance. A few come simply because they cannot bear to stand still while everything they love rots—if the world is ending, they would rather ride toward the fire than watch it from a distance.

These Companions are apothecaries and relic-smiths, gravesquires and scouts, hedge-priests with cracked icons, hunters who know every ditch and deer-run in a blighted valley. They are widows who learned to use the bow after the first undead harvest took their husbands. They are failed Choir novices who fled doctrine and now try to redeem themselves by sabotaging their former masters. They are stable-boys who refuse to leave the war-horse that is the last echo of a fallen Ral. None of them are safe. All of them know that staying close to a death-knight is like living on the lip of a volcano.

At the table, these people are more than flavor text. They are the faces the world wears when it speaks back to the Protagonist. They change how a fight feels, how a negotiation unfolds, how a journey through corpses and plague carts is endured. When a Companion steps between a Ral and a Ghoul Knight's lance, or quietly places a cup of warmed wine at the edge of a silent midnight watch, the story bends around that choice.

This chapter is about those people: how the One-on-One engine thinks about Companions in general, and how *The Order of Ral* sharpens that idea into something harsher, more vulnerable, and more necessary in the shadow of the Grave Star.

Companions in the One-on-One Engine

In the core One-on-One RPG System, a Protagonist stands alone in the spotlight, but never truly walks alone through the world. The rules are written with the assumption that there are other figures moving at the edges of the frame: allies, retainers, rivals who become uneasy friends, and hangers-on who somehow keep surviving every catastrophe. These are Companions, and they exist so that duet play never collapses into a monologue between the Director and a solitary hero.

A Companion, in the engine's eyes, is not a second character sheet competing for attention. They are a focused bundle of capability and personality that travels beside the Protagonist and bends the odds in specific ways. A good Companion makes the Protagonist's choices sharper, not easier. They provide an extra hand on the rope, a second blade at the doorway, or a quiet voice in the next room that asks, "Are you sure?" right before the dice hit the table.

Mechanically, the system keeps Companions light. They do not need full Attribute spreads, inventories, and advancement tracks to matter. They have a few **Key Ratings** that define what they are actually good for in play—"holds the shield line," "patches wounds," "knows how courts work," "keeps watch without falling asleep." They carry **Signature Traits** that tell the Director when they ought to be able to tilt a roll or intercept a consequence. And above all, they act through a tightly defined set of **Companion Actions** that plug cleanly into the core resolution loop: they Assist, they Screen, they Anchor.

In fiction, this means a Companion rarely steals the scene; instead, they change how the scene lands on the Protagonist. A squire doesn't perform the duel; they steady the shield and call out warnings. A scout doesn't run the whole infiltration; they give the Protagonist that crucial +10 when it actually counts. When Companions bleed, panic, or rise to greatness, the system favors bold narrative moves instead of bookkeeping—conditions, flags, and clear consequences over intricate personal damage tracks.

The One-on-One engine assumes that the Protagonist is the lens through which the story is told. Companions bend that lens—they add depth, color, and stakes—but they never seize the camera. In *The Order of Ral*, this same design is used, then stained dark and nailed into a world where following the "hero" may be the most dangerous choice a mortal can make.

In the core **One-on-One RPG System**, a Protagonist is never meant to carry the entire world on their back alone. The rules assume a rotating cast of **Companions**:

- People who travel with the Protagonist,
- Lend Skills and steel,
- And give the Director a way to show the world talking back.

Mechanically, Companions are deliberately **lighter** than full characters:

- They have a handful of **Key Ratings** (a few Skills and perhaps one Attribute).
- They bring 1–3 **Signature Traits** that describe what they do best.
- They share a small set of **Universal Companion Actions**:
    - **Assist** – give the Protagonist a bonus to a Test when they work together.
    - **Screen** – blunt incoming danger, especially from being outnumbered or flanked.
    - **Anchor** – buy time, steady Clocks, and keep situations from spiraling.

They are not "second PCs." They exist to:

- Give the Protagonist **tactical levers** beyond their own body,
- Populate the fiction with **faces that matter**,
- And give the Director a way to **wound the story** without immediately killing the Protagonist.

All the usual Companion rules from Book I still apply:

- Companions rarely roll for everything; they mostly **modify** the Protagonist's Tests.
- Their injuries, panic, or heroics are handled with simple mechanical flags and strong fiction rather than full-blown PC wound tracking.

- The Protagonist remains the **center of the camera**; Companions tilt the camera, they do not seize it.

This chapter takes those core ideas and **sinks them into the world** of *The Order of Ral*.

Companions in the Order of Ral

In this setting, the idea of a Companion stops being a comfortable genre expectation and becomes a provocation: **who chooses to ride beside the dead?**

The Protagonist is a Ral—an undead death-knight in plate that never truly cools, bound to a war-horse that should have been bones in a pit years ago. Their nights are spent awake under empty sky or in crypt-lit halls, listening to the distant ticking of the Grave Star. They do not share the human rhythms of sleep, hunger, or aging. Their bond is to an Order, to a vow, and to a god-corpse in the heavens they have sworn to defy.

By contrast, the Companions who ride with them are painfully, exquisitely alive.

They shiver on cold watch, fall sick after long marches in the rain, and flinch when steel bites flesh. They argue over whether the next village will welcome a Ral or bolt the doors. They know what it means to grow older; every new scar actually moves them closer to the grave, not merely changes the shape of their armor.

To choose to travel with a Ral is to make a very specific bargain with terror. You accept that your leader does not sleep when you do, and might listen to you breathing in the dark like a physician listening for a failing heart. You accept that the thing you follow was once a knight or lord or champion, but now answers to a Chapterhouse council and a vow that may not leave much room for your small, mortal fears. You accept that, if the numbers go badly in some frozen lane or burning nave, the eyes inside that helm may weigh your life against a Choir node or a city's worth of souls and decide that you are an acceptable loss.

And still, some people step forward.

They are gravesquires who grew up polishing armor plates and watching their masters ride out, and cannot bear to spend their lives oiling empty harnesses. They are apothecaries who have seen too many plague carts and would rather risk their throats than measure another dose of useless syrup. They are hedge-priests whose sermons failed to stop the Grave Star's rise, now determined to follow those who actually stand in its light. They are deserters from Choir cohorts who woke up one day and realized they were marching behind a dead star's shadow and could not live with it.

These Companions operate under the same mechanical framework as any One-on-One support character, but here their **emotional gravity** is stronger. Their loyalty, awe, revulsion, and fear are tracked and tested. As the Ral gathers Corruption, some Companions cringe and consider leaving; others lean closer, convinced that only a monster can kill a monster. Bonds forged in the Chapterhouse—over shared work, confession, and rare laughter—reach out onto the road, so that any death in the field sends a shudder back through the stronghold and its politics.

In *The Order of Ral*, a Companion is never just a +10 on a roll. They are the living measure of what the Ral is fighting for and how far from humanity they have already drifted. Every time you call on a Companion to Assist, to Screen, to Anchor, you are not just pushing a number—you are asking a breathing, breakable person to step closer to the edge of the same darkness that already claimed you.

In this setting, the Companion rules sit inside a very specific tension:

- The Protagonist is an **undead death-knight**, a Ral.
- Their mount is an **undead war-horse**, bound by Grave Bond.
- The people who ride beside them are **fragile, living, terrified, and necessary.**

For a mortal to travel with a Ral is to accept that:

- Their leader does not sleep as they do.
- Their lord is pulled by the **Grave Star** and might one day look at them and see "acceptable losses."
- There is a real chance their Quietus will have a witness who cannot cry over their body.

That dynamic gives us three important setting-specific additions:

1. **Relationship Tiers** – a formal, mechanical way to track how far a Companion is willing to go for a creature like you.
2. **Corruption Interaction** – at high Corruption, some Companions shudder; some lean in.
3. **Stronghold Bonds** – road Companions are **tied back** to the Chapterhouse and its NPC web; losing one is never just a tactical loss.

Companion Statlines in This Module

To keep the focus on fiction, use **compact stat blocks** for traveling Companions:

- **Name & Epithet** – who are they, in a single breath?
- **Archetype** – their role (scout, serjeant, hedge-priest, ex-Choir acolyte, etc.).
- **Personality & Quirks** – how they color scenes.
- **Role in the Duo** – what they are for in play.
- **Key Ratings** – 4–6 ratings, usually Skills, sometimes one Attribute.
- **Signature Traits** – 1–3 short mechanical hooks.
- **Universal Companion Actions** – the same for all Companions.
- **Personal Gear** – concrete items that explain why they matter.

Mechanically:

- **Key Ratings** are expressed as percentages (like Skills), usually in the **30–60%** band.
- Companions may have one standout rating (60–70%) in their specialty.
- Anything unlisted is assumed to be **baseline, unremarkable** or resolved purely via fiction and Protagonist Tests.

You do **not** need full Attribute arrays for every Companion. Pick what matters for their job.

Universal Companion Actions (Order of Ral Version)

All Companions in this module share the following basic tactical options. They are abstractions of the many small things a human can do to keep an undead knight alive.

Assist

The Companion focuses entirely on helping you make *this* move succeed.

Examples in fiction:

- Throwing a lantern to light the necromancer just as you strike.
- Holding a shield at your blind side while you swing two-handed.
- Whispering a warning about a collapsing beam as you sprint under it.
- Chanting a familiar prayer to steady your hand for a Faith Test.

Mechanics:

- If the Companion is in a plausible position to help, you may declare **Assist** before you roll.

- By default, Assist grants **+10** to your Skill Test.
- If the situation is strongly aligned to their Key Ratings (e.g., your shot is guided by a master archer, your negotiation is supported by a Companion with high Persuasion), the Director may instead grant **Advantage** *if* your Relationship Tier with that Companion is **2 (Trusted)** or higher.
- A Companion can usually **Assist once per scene** without risk; repeated Assists in a prolonged melee may start to expose them to harm at the Director's discretion.

Screen

The Companion places their body, shield, or attention between you and danger.

Examples in fiction:

- Planting a shield in front of a spear thrust meant for your flank.
- Bogging down two ghouls so only one can reach you at a time.
- Riding their own mount into a side alley to draw half the pack away.
- Slamming a door in the face of a charger, taking splinters and impact.

Mechanics:

- When outnumbered or under concentrated attack, a Companion can **Screen**:
    - Reduce your effective **Outnumbered penalty by one step** (e.g., –20 becomes –10, –10 becomes 0) for that exchange.
- At **Relationship Tier 2+**, once per scene, they may **throw themselves fully into the Screen**:
    - Treat your Outnumbered penalty as **0**, but the Companion is placed at **immediate risk**:
    - The Director may call for a Companion harm roll, or
    - Inflict a narrative serious injury that must be treated in downtime.

Anchor

The Companion keeps something from getting worse.

Examples in fiction:

- Standing watch so you can rest without the Pursuit Clock advancing.
- Bracing a failing door or shaky scaffolding while you work at the real problem.
- Holding terrified villagers together long enough for you to confront the main threat.
- Maintaining a chant or steady torch light during a delicate ritual.

Mechanics:

- When a **Clock** (Consequence, Pursuit, Collapse, Panic, etc.) is about to tick up due to inaction or background pressure, a Companion may **Anchor**:
    - On a reasonable narratively supported declaration, the Director may **delay the tick** for one exchange or one short scene.
    - If the Companion is particularly suited (high Command, Oratory, or relevant Skill), the Director may even allow **one full tick reduction** on a non-hostile Clock (e.g., Panic, Confusion among NPCs) on a successful Test.
- At **Relationship Tier 3 (Bound)**, once per session, a Companion may **Anchor at great cost**:

- You may automatically hold a dangerous Clock one step below its trigger point for the duration of a short scene (e.g., the cave doesn't collapse, the mob doesn't riot, the ritual doesn't rupture yet),
- But the Companion must suffer a serious consequence—exhaustion, injury, a shaken faith, or an experience that will not leave them unchanged.

Relationship Tiers & Companions

The **Relationship Tier** framework introduced for Stronghold NPCs applies equally, and even more sharply, to traveling Companions.

For each Companion, track a Tier from **0 to 3**:

- **Tier 0 – Wary**
  They do their job, but watch you the way one watches a cliff about to break. They will not follow into obvious suicide or star-tainted madness without coercion or pay.
- **Tier 1 – Professional**
  Mutual respect and working rhythm. They know how you fight and who you are in the field; you know what to expect from them. Favors are repaid; orders are obeyed unless clearly insane.
- **Tier 2 – Trusted**
  They share fears, ask for your help, and volunteer for things that frighten them because *you* asked. They are willing to risk harm, reputation, and sometimes a part of their soul.
- **Tier 3 – Bound**
  Their fate and yours are knotted. They will follow you into cursed hollows, fight when everyone else runs, and stand between you and Quietus if there is any chance it will matter.

How Relationship Tiers Affect Mechanics

In addition to the narrative effects, Tiers adjust how Companion mechanics work:

- **Tier 0 – Wary**
  - They will **Assist** and **Anchor** in low-risk ways, but **Screen** is limited:
    - They will not throw themselves into obvious lethal positions for you unless coerced (Command test, or payment).
  - Director may impose **–10** to any social Test where you try to pull on personal loyalty.
- **Tier 1 – Professional**
  - Full access to **Assist, Screen, Anchor** as written.
  - Once per **adventure**, the Companion may offer a small **unsolicited Assist** when the Director judges they would instinctively step in.
  - No inherent modifiers to social Tests.
- **Tier 2 – Trusted**
  - As above, plus:
    - **Assist:** Once per scene, may upgrade **+10** to **Advantage** when they are in their specialty.
    - **Screen:** Once per scene, may reduce Outnumbered penalty to **0** at the cost of personal risk.
    - **Anchor:** May attempt Tests to **reverse** one segment of a non-lethal Clock (Panic, Confusion, etc.).
  - Social Tests to persuade them into risky plans gain **+10**.

- **Tier 3 – Bound**
    - All the above, plus:
        - Once per **session**, a Bound Companion may **automatically succeed** at one Assist/Screen/Anchor declaration that is plausible in the fiction, even without a roll, at a serious cost to themselves.
        - You may spend **Destiny** (if using Destiny rules) to save them from Quietus once, as if you were burning fate for yourself; doing so should be a major scene.
    - Betraying or recklessly endangering a Bound Companion can drop them **two Tiers at once**, or lead to them leaving (or becoming a bitter antagonist).

Advancement along Tiers comes from:

- **Downtime scenes** where you genuinely engage with their fears, hopes, or work.
- **Actions** during missions: defending them, trusting their judgment, preserving their dignity.
- Successful **relationship Tests** (Persuasion, Insight, Faith, Command, etc.) at key turning points.

Neglect, cruelty, or treating them as expendable will tick up internal **Strain** and eventually lower Tiers—sometimes silently until the worst possible moment.

Corruption, Companions & the Grave Star

Companions are also **mirrors** for your Corruption.

As the Ral's Corruption band shifts:

- Some Companions grow **uneasy** (Tier gains slow; they hesitate to follow).
- Some are **drawn to the darkness** (ex-Choir, nihilists, those who think Athrakar will win).
- At **Gravebound** and **Star-Lost** levels, the Director should actively ask:
    - *Why is this Companion still here? What do they want from this walking grave?*

Mechanically:

- At **Touched by the Grave (30–59)**, impose **–10** to Tier advancement rolls for particularly devout or soft-hearted Companions, unless the Ral has made clear efforts at mercy and penance.
- At **Gravebound (60–79)**, certain Companions may **cap** their Relationship at Tier 1 or 2 unless a personal quest or miracle intervenes.
- At **Star-Lost (80–100)**, only the most damaged or devoted Companions will stay; others will flee, turn against you, or demand you release them.

Companions thus serve as a **human barometer**: when the last one refuses to share a fire with you, the Grave Star has almost won.

Premade Traveling Companions

Below are six companions designed to travel with a Ral. They are not tied to specific Stronghold posts; they are the kind of people who ride out into the night and fully expect not to come back.

All use the same structural format as the Tamsin example.

Corin Harthold — Road-Serjeant of the Broken Banner

Archetype: Veteran Man-at-Arms / Shield-Leader

Personality & Quirks:
Gravel-voiced, scarred, and unhurried. Corin swears by old border gods under his breath even as he salutes chapel relics. He chews on clove buds to cover the smell of fear in barracks. Keeps a careful list of fallen men and women—never on paper, always recited from memory when drunk or very tired.

Role in the Duo:
Front-line bulwark and serjeant of any foot you bring. Corin keeps lesser fighters where they need to be and stands where the line is thinnest.

Key Ratings:

- Blades 55% (arming sword, close work in shield wall)
- Shields 60% (holds doors, anchors lines)
- Athletics 45% (brace, shove, shoulder-charge)
- Command 50% (shouted orders, rallying broken ranks)
- Awareness 45% (reading enemy formations, spotting flanks)

Signature Traits:

- **Wall of One Man:**
  When Corin Screens for you in a chokepoint (doorway, stair, alley), he reduces your Outnumbered penalty by **two steps** (e.g., –20 to 0) for that exchange—but next enemy focus is likely to fall on him.
- **Serjeant's Bark:**
  Once per scene, when you or allied NPCs must make a Morale- or panic-related Test, Corin may Assist with **Command**, granting **+10**; on a strong success, he also downgrades one "Flee" or "Break" outcome to a temporary fallback instead.
- **Grim Respect:**
  Corin respects honest brutality but despises pointless cruelty. If you spare noncombatants or keep faith with promises to common soldiers, you gain **+10** to the next social Test you make involving him or his squad.

Universal Companion Actions:

- **Assist (+10):**
  Braces your shield, calls incoming blows, or physically drags you clear of a spear line.
- **Screen:**
  Steps into a threatened arc, treating any attack from that direction as if you were not Outnumbered for that moment.
- **Anchor:**
  Holds retreat routes open, keeps militia from bolting, and slows "Garrison Breaks" or "Gate Fails" Clocks by one segment when put in charge of a small unit.

Personal Gear:

- Battered mail shirt, old but solid kettle helm, heavy round shield marked with a faded banner.
- Well-maintained arming sword, dagger, whistle on thong.
- A pouch of clove buds, bone tally-sticks notched for each campaign season survived.

Ysabet Thorn-White — Hedge-Priest of the Roadside Flames

Archetype: Itinerant Hedge-Priest / Field Exorcist

Personality & Quirks:
Tall, reed-thin, hair bound back with scrap cloth. Laughs softly and rarely, often at herself. Carries a

bundle of cheap wooden icons alongside a single genuine relic shard she never shows. Muttered prayers accompany everything she does—lighting a fire, setting a splint, driving a nail.

Role in the Duo:
Spiritual buffer and battlefield chaplain. Ysabet keeps faith alive in the dirt and muck, and stands between the living and the things that want their souls.

Key Ratings:

- Faith 55% (improvised rites, battlefield blessings)
- Theology 45% (doctrine and heresies, especially practical ones)
- Exorcism & Banishment 50% (small-scale hauntings and possessions)
- Medicine/Chirurgery 40% (binding wounds, pulling arrows)
- Oratory 40% (simple sermons, calming crowds)

Signature Traits:

- **Ragged Blessing:**
  Once per scene, Ysabet can Assist a Faith-based Test (yours or another NPC's) with **+10** even if the conditions are far from ideal (muddy field, half-remembered liturgy). On a strong success, her presence negates one minor negative twist the Director might have applied.
- **Witch-Fire Rebuke:**
  When facing lesser undead driven by malice or habit rather than great will, Ysabet may attempt an **Exorcism & Banishment** Test as an Assist to your attack; on success, your first attack against those foes gains **+10** and counts as if backed by Sanctity for purposes of overcoming basic undead resistances.
- **Patchwork Doctrine:**
  Ysabet knows a thousand small sects and local practices. When dealing with common folk or local clergy, you gain **+10** to Etiquette or Persuasion Tests if you allow her to speak first and frame your presence.

Universal Companion Actions:

- **Assist (+10):**
  Holds a relic aloft, chants, or simply grips your gauntlet and whispers the right name at the right moment.
- **Screen:**
  Throws herself between a panicked villager and danger, or physically drags someone clear, keeping the chaos off you.
- **Anchor:**
  Leads prayers to keep fear from tipping into riot, slows "Panic" or "Blasphemous Rumor" Clocks, and can keep a vigil going all night so that spiritual pressure does not tick upward.

Personal Gear:

- Faded travelling cloak with sewn-in icon pockets, simple stave capped with a worn symbol of the Sun-Host.
- Wrapped bundle of votive candles, cheap icons, small jars of blessed ash, flint and steel.
- Hidden relic splinter in a leather thong, kept under her shirt, never voluntarily displayed.

Marrik "Latchbolt" Deren — Bastard Arbalester

Archetype: Mercenary Crossbowman / Siege Skirmisher

Personality & Quirks:
Dry-humored, sharp-eyed, always chewing something (grain, twig, nails if desperate). Marrik hates ladders and loves solid rooftops. He names his crossbows with terrible puns and repaints the stocks between jobs.

Role in the Duo:
Ranged precision and siege nuisance. Marrik handles

killing things at distance, tagging leaders, and baiting foes into bad terrain.

Key Ratings:

- Archery 60% (crossbows, short bows at need)
- Stealthcraft 45% (roof lines, shadows, scaffold work)
- Awareness 55% (spotting lines of fire, glints, openings)
- Streetwise 40% (knowing where people stand in any given town)
- Athletics 40% (climb, duck, roll)

Signature Traits:

- **"Latchbolt" Shot:**
  Once per scene, Marrik may Assist your attack against a significant target (leader, caster, banner-bearer). If he has line of sight and time to aim, the Assist is **+10**, and on a strong success you may also impose a small tactical effect (drop the banner, stagger the caster, force a leader into cover).
- **Cover Gremlin:**
  When you take cover in a firefight, Marrik's presence grants **+10** to any Tests to maintain that cover under fire or reposition without being nailed, provided he is free to move and call cues.
- **Professional Distance:**
  Marrik's loyalty is purchased but not blind. As long as he is paid and you don't indulge in overtly suicidal or pointless cruelty, treat him as **Tier 1 – Professional** by default. Betray deals or indulge in needless massacres, and his Tier may crash instantly.

Universal Companion Actions:

- **Assist (+10):**
  Lights targets for you, calls wind and distance, repositions to give you clean angles.
- **Screen:**
  Puts a bolt into someone about to flank you, or forces a rush to hesitate, effectively reducing Outnumbered for that beat.
- **Anchor:**
  Harasses advancing lines or siege crews, slowing "Enemy Advances" or "Gate Gets Rammed" Clocks by picking off key actors.

Personal Gear:

- Heavy crossbow with crank, lighter hunting bow, quivers of bolts (some marked for special use).
- Leather jack with extra shoulder padding, hooded cloak for dark work.
- Simple grapnel, short coil of rope, chalk, and a small pouch of stolen choir-chips he swears he is "just holding for a friend."

Riala Dusksong — Border Huntress

Archetype: Scout / Tracker of the Marches

Personality & Quirks:
Quiet, wry, more comfortable with dogs and crows than people. Riala hums under her breath when tense; the melodies are old marching songs from forgotten wars. Hates wasting food or arrows.

Role in the Duo:
Eyes and ears in the wild, advance warning of undead movements, pathfinder in bad country.

Key Ratings:

- Tracking 60% (living, dead, and "should-not-be-moving" things)

- Wilderness Survival 55% (forage, shelter, weather signs)
- Archery 50% (short bow, quick shots)
- Stealthcraft 50% (brush, woods, broken stone)
- Beast Handling 40% (hounds, pack animals)

Signature Traits:

- **Grave-Sign Reader:**
  When investigating scenes of slaughter or undead passage, Riala may roll **Tracking** to Assist your Investigation; on success, you gain **+10** and the Director must answer at least one clear question about numbers, speed, or direction with solid detail.
- **Trail Thinner:**
  If given time before a pursuit, Riala can **Anchor** a "Pursuit" Clock by altering or breaking your trail—once per chase, she may reduce that Clock by one segment on a successful Tracking Test.
- **March-Hard:**
  When Riala is managing your overland movement, you may treat one day of exhausting travel as if it were merely difficult: **Endure Hardship Tests gain +10**, and Supply loss from routine wear can be reduced by 5 at the Director's discretion.

Universal Companion Actions:

- **Assist (+10):**
  Guides your steps through swamp or scree, points out safe branches, or warns of sudden drops.
- **Screen:**
  Sets simple snares or spring-lines that slow an onrushing pack, reducing effective Outnumbered in the first clash.
- **Anchor:**
  Stays awake on watch, keeping "Ambush" or "Lost in the Dark" Clocks from ticking while you rest.

Personal Gear:

- Weather-stained cloak, short bow, hunting knife, light spear or staff.
- Satchel of jerky, dried fruit, smoker herbs, small snares and cord.
- Bone whistle for signaling, a leather token from a village that no longer exists.

Jahan Vehl — Broken Choir Acolyte

Archetype: Ex-Choir Initiate / Tainted Guide

Personality & Quirks:
Soft-spoken, intense, avoids direct eye contact. Jahan's hands shake when he is near active Choir rites; he has old scarification along his ribs and spine in sigils he keeps covered. Compulsively counts steps under his breath to stay steady.

Role in the Duo:
Guide to Choir structures, lore about their rites, and a dangerous kind of bridge into the enemy's thinking.

Key Ratings:

- Lore: Choir & Heresies 60% (inner doctrine, splinter cells, non-public rites)
- Lore: Arcane 45% (their ritual patterns and bindings)
- Sorcery 40% (small-scale, dangerous working)
- Deception 50% (cover stories, false ritual lines)
- Insight 45% (reading zeal, fear, and doubt in cultists)

Signature Traits:

- **Whispers of Athrakar:**
  Jahan can Assist your attempts to disrupt or misdirect Choir rituals. When you oppose a

Choir rite, his Aid with Lore: Choir & Heresies grants **+10**; on a strong success, the Director may downgrade the ritual's effect or buy you one extra exchange before it fully manifests.

- **Tainted Tongue:**
  Once per session, Jahan may speak in Choir cant to mislead or stall low-ranking cultists. On a successful **Deception** Test, you gain Advantage on one action (escape, ambush setup, sabotage) before they realize something is wrong.
- **Fragile Defector:**
  Jahan's Relationship Tier is highly sensitive to **how you treat Choir captives and atrocities**. Showing unnecessary cruelty or indulging in Choir-like acts can rapidly drop his Tier—or push him back toward Athrakar.

Universal Companion Actions:

- **Assist (+10):**
  Interprets sigils, warns about which glyph not to step on, or finishes a sentence the cult leader expects to hear.
- **Screen:**
  Throws himself between you and a sudden ritual backlash, mystic shock, or social suspicion, easing pressure while you act.
- **Anchor:**
  Helps contain lesser spiritual backlash, delaying or mitigating "Ritual Corruption" or "Sanity Fracture" Clocks at great personal cost.

Personal Gear:

- Plain travel clothes over a concealed Choir-issue under-robe, carefully burned in places.
- A small pouch of ritual chalks and bone chips he claims to keep "for reference."
- A knife he never uses if he can help it.

Elske Morren — Chirurgeon of the Black Road

Archetype: Field Chirurgeon / Alchemical Medic

Personality & Quirks:
Blunt, sardonic, keeps her black hair tightly braided back. Smells of vinegar, smoke, and poultices. Talks to her tools ("Don't break on me now, girl") and hums lullabies when stitching even hardened mercenaries.

Role in the Duo:
You don't bring Elske because you expect an easy ride. You bring her because you know **you will need someone to put you back together**.

Key Ratings:

- Medicine/Chirurgery 60% (field surgery, triage, battlefield stabilization)
- Herbalism 50% (poultices, sedatives, basic antidotes)
- Alchemy 45% (tinctures, pain draughts, disinfectants)
- Endure Hardship 45% (long watches, bad conditions)
- Persuasion 40% (getting hard cases to sit down and let her treat them)

Signature Traits:

- **"Hold Still or Die":**
  When Elske is present and able to work, your post-battle stabilization or Wound-recovery Tests gain **+10**; on a strong success, she may also remove one lingering minor complication (infection risk, reduced limb use) at the Director's discretion.
- **Grim Triage:**
  Once per scene involving multiple casualties, Elske may Anchor a "Casualty" Clock: a successful Medicine/Chirurgery Test can hold the Clock from advancing while you deal with

immediate threats, or reduce it by one step if the scene allows focused treatment.

- **Bitter Bedside Manner:**
  Elske's presence in camp grants Advantage on one **Endure Hardship** Test per downtime (her routines and tonics keep people from collapsing). However, she expects brutal honesty; lying to her about your condition may hurt your Relationship Tier.

Universal Companion Actions:

- **Assist (+10):**
  Hands you the right tool mid-procedure, calls out "higher" or "to the left" during delicate work, or throws you a tonic when your hand is shaking.
- **Screen:**
  Drags wounded out of the line of fire, letting you continue to fight without penalty for abandoning them.
- **Anchor:**
  Keeps dying NPCs from tipping into Quietus before you can act, or maintains a crude infirmary under pressure, slowing disease or injury-related Clocks.

Personal Gear:

- Leather roll of scalpels, hooks, needles, and clamps; worn but meticulously maintained.
- Satchel of bandages, herbs, alcohol, hard candies ("for bribes"), and one nasty-smelling emergency stimulant.
- Apron stiffened with old bloodstains, a pair of cracked but beloved bone-handled shears.

These six, together with your Stronghold Companions, give the Director a **living cast** to rotate through your missions:

- Corin and Marrik when the work is all steel and sieges.
- Ysabet and Jahan when faith and heresy are at stake.
- Riala when the path itself is the enemy.
- Elske when you know the dice will not go your way forever.

Each of them tracks Relationship Tiers, each of them feels your Corruption like a change in the weather, and each of them offers the same unspoken question every time you ride out:

> "If I die beside you, will it have meant anything?"

Chapter 4: Companion Relationship Development

In *the Order of Ral*, people don't just *work* for a death-knight—they orbit them, they test them, they decide little by little whether this corpse in plate is a master, a monster, or the last sane thing left in the world.

Relationships need to feel like that in play.

Below is how Relationship scores start, move, and break, in a way that plugs neatly into **Companions of the Damned** and the existing One-on-One mechanics.

Relationship Tiers & Scores in Play

Every Companion—whether Stronghold-based or a travelling ally—has a **Relationship Tier** with the Ral:

- **Tier 0 — Wary**
  They do their duty but keep distance. Polite, guarded, waiting to see what you are.
- **Tier 1 — Professional**
  Mutual respect. They trust your competence, expect you to keep your word, and will trade minor favors.
- **Tier 2 — Trusted**
  They volunteer extra effort, share worries, and ask for help. They start to see you as "my Ral," not "the Ral."
- **Tier 3 — Bound**
  They have tied their fate to yours. They will follow into extreme peril, and your choices burn them deeply—good or ill.

Mechanically, that Tier is the **Relationship score** you track (0–3).

Optionally, you can hang a tiny **Relationship Clock** under it for finer movement: a **0–4 tick track** that measures progress *within* the current Tier.

- **0–4 ticks** under a Tier.
- When ticks reach **4**, reset to 0 and **Tier +1** (up to max Tier 3).
- When ticks would drop below **0**, reset to 0 and **Tier –1** (down to min Tier 0).

You *don't* have to show this clock to the player, but it keeps you honest about when the relationship really turns.

Where Companions Start

Use the fiction to pick Tier, then adjust with the clock over time.

Stronghold (Secondary) Companions

At campaign start:

- **Most Chapterhouse staff** (Relic-Smiths, Gravesquires, Healers, quartermasters, scribes) begin at
  Tier 1 – Professional, **0 ticks**.
  They know what a Ral is, they've seen one before, and they have chosen to live under your shadow—but they do not know *you* yet.
- **Those explicitly tied to your backstory** (a Gravesquire who served you in life, a healer who stayed at your bier during the ritual) may start at
  Tier 2 – Trusted, **1–2 ticks**, if you want the bond to feel already warmed.
- **Suspicious or coerced staff** (former Choir clerks forced to serve, captive alchemists, political "gifts") can start at
  Tier 0 – Wary, **0–2 ticks**, and might never rise if you don't work at it.

Travelling Companions

When you first take someone on the road:

- **Fresh hire, rescued villager, mercenary scout:**

Tier 0 – Wary, 0 ticks. They're still deciding whether this was a terrible idea.

- **Long-standing ally from your history or prior missions:**
  Tier 1 – Professional, **2–3 ticks**, or even **Tier 2 – Trusted** if you want them to feel like an established partner out of the gate.
- **Soul-deep bond (lover, sworn oath-brother/sister, redeemed Choir defector you saved):**
  You may *start* them at **Tier 2 – Trusted** with **3–4 ticks**, or even **Tier 3 – Bound** if the entire campaign is built around that relationship. Bound out of the gate should be rare and intentional.

Important Note: Mounts

Your undead war-horse uses its **own Bond track (Bond 1–5)** and rules, *not* this Relationship Tier system. The two are thematically linked, but mechanically separate:

- **Mount = Grave Bond 1–5**
- **Humanoid Companion = Relationship Tier 0–3 (+ optional ticks)**

How Relationships Increase

Relationships rise through **time, scenes, and costly choices.** Not generic "we travelled together," but specific moments when the Ral does something that matters to that Companion.

In rules terms: you **advance ticks** on the Relationship Clock, and occasionally step the Tier.

1. Downtime Scenes (Slow, Steady Growth)

Whenever the Ral spends a **Downtime focus** on a Companion—talking, training, sharing a meal, fixing armor together, confessing, etc.—and the scene feels real (not perfunctory), you can:

- **Mark +1 tick** on that Companion's Relationship Clock
  if the scene was honest and not undercut by cruelty or dismissal.

If the scene **directly hits their personal issue** (their fear, their doubt, their goal), and the Ral responds well:

- **Mark +2 ticks** instead of +1.

If the scene goes badly—cold rejection, mockery, or a direct violation of their values:

- **Mark –1 tick**, or even **–2 ticks** for cruelty or contempt.

You don't have to roll for every scene. Only roll when:

- The Ral is *forcing* a leap (e.g., asking them to share a deep secret now), or
- The relationship is at an inflection point.

In those cases, call for a **social Test** (Persuasion, Faith, Command, Intimidation, etc.), and:

- **Win:** award the higher tick change you had in mind.
- **Lesser Win:** award the smaller; they're moved, but cautious.
- **Loss:** no positive ticks, or even a small negative if the attempt was clumsy or harmful.

2. On-Mission Sacrifice & Loyalty

In the field, you can move a relationship *fast* when the stakes justify it.

Typical triggers for **+1 to +2 ticks**:

- The Ral **risks themselves** to protect the Companion (taking a hit, burning Destiny to keep them alive).
- The Ral **trusts them with authority** (leaving them in charge of a retreat, a negotiation, the Stronghold's defense).

Triggers for a full **Tier increase in one stroke** (or +3–4 ticks, effectively pushing them over):

- The Ral **chooses them over victory** in a critical moment (e.g., aborting a mission to save them).
- The Ral **publicly defies the Choir, a Chapterhouse superior, or a Sinister** on that Companion's behalf.
- The Companion's personal quest is completed in a way that honors their values.

When in doubt: if everyone at the table agrees "this is a turning-point moment for their bond," give **at least +2 ticks**, possibly a Tier step.

How Relationships Decrease

You don't have to assassinate a Companion for the relationship to rot. Often it dies in small, quiet ways.

Mechanically, you **remove ticks** or drop a Tier when the Ral's actions cut against the Companion's values or safety.

1. Neglect and Broken Promises

Typical triggers for **–1 tick**:

- Repeatedly ignoring a Companion's reasonable warnings or pleas.
- Failing to follow through on a promise that mattered to *them* (and wasn't just trivial).

For **–2 ticks**:

- Using them as bait or expendable asset **without their informed consent**.
- Publicly humiliating or undermining them in front of people whose opinion they care about.

If this happens at **Tier 2–3**, and it's a pattern, you may justify a **full Tier drop** after a few such hits.

2. Betrayal, Horror & Moral Collapse

Some actions are big enough to shatter trust almost instantly.

Consider an **immediate Tier drop** (and possibly to a hard floor of Tier 0) if:

- The Ral **knowingly sacrifices the Companion's family/community** for tactical gain.
- The Ral's Corruption-driven act horrifies them (e.g., murdering captives, cutting a pact with a Sinister) in a way that violates their core beliefs.
- The Ral abandons a Bound Companion in a moment when they had clearly promised not to.

In these cases, you can:

- **Drop Tier by 1–2 steps instantly**, and
- Set the Relationship Clock to **0 or a negative state** the Ral must climb out of slowly, if at all.

Sometimes, the Companion simply leaves. If the fiction says they're done, don't force mechanics to keep them around.

Typical Starting & Movement Summary (Mechanical Snapshot)

For quick reference:

- **Relationship Score = Tier 0–3**, often with a hidden **0–4 tick clock** under it.
- **Starting Tiers:**
  - Stronghold Companion: usually **Tier 1**, 0 ticks.
  - New hire / rescued stranger: **Tier 0**, 0 ticks.
  - Established ally from backstory: **Tier 1–2**, 1–3 ticks.

    - Deep bond from the outset: **Tier 2–3**, 3–4 ticks (rare, intentional).
- **Increasing Relationship:**
    - Good downtime scene: **+1 tick**.
    - Deep, personal downtime scene: **+2 ticks**.
    - Major in-mission sacrifice or loyalty: **+2 to +4 ticks** or direct Tier +1.
    - At **4 ticks**, reset to 0 and Tier +1 (max Tier 3).
- **Decreasing Relationship:**
    - Minor hurt / neglect: **–1 tick**.
    - Serious breach or cruelty: **–2 ticks**.
    - Major betrayal / horror: drop **Tier –1 or –2** and reset ticks to 0.
    - If ticks would go below 0, reset to 0 and Tier –1 (min Tier 0).

This keeps Companion bonds **squarely inside the One-on-One engine**: no separate minigame, just visible consequences for how a Ral treats the few living souls who dare to stand near them.

Chapter 5: Clocks in the Order of Ral

When the World Tightens Its Grip

The Grave Star does not rush.

It watches. It waits while villages grow afraid, while rumor thickens into certainty, while supplies run thin and wounds fester because no one had time to stitch them properly. The Choir of the Grave Star moves the same way—pressing from a dozen angles at once until something finally breaks.

At the table, **Clocks** are how you track that pressure.

They are not punishment meters. They are **visible dials of doom** that show how close you are to:

- a patrol finding your camp,
- the weather turning lethal,
- the Chapterhouse's patience fraying,
- a Choir node waking up under your feet.

They turn slow, then suddenly.

What a Clock Is

A **Clock** is a tracked countdown (or buildup) that represents **escalating pressure** in the story. It advances when the fiction calls for it—usually on **Losses**, risky choices, delays, loud actions, or when consequences are ignored.

Clocks are a pacing tool:

- to keep scenes moving
- to make stakes tangible
- to ensure that a **Lesser Win still costs something**
- to let problems persist without inventing new subsystems

Think of them as **threat barometers**: rumor, pursuit, hunger, weather, Choir attention, Chapterhouse strain, Corruption pressure.

When to Use a Clock (Three Triggers)

Start a Clock when at least one of these is true:

1. **Time matters** –
   You can't just keep trying forever without something else catching up (patrols, dawn, the Choir ritual in the crypt).
2. **Attention matters** –
   Someone or something is noticing what you do (villagers, informers, Choir spies, saints, the Grave Star).
3. **Cost matters** –
   The Protagonist can "win," but must pay in some kind of pressure (political, spiritual, physical).

If none of those are true, you usually don't need a Clock. Just resolve the action and move on.

Clock Sizes (Quick Guidance)

Use simple sizes. Don't overcomplicate.

- **4-tick Clock:** urgent, immediate

  > "The Choir patrol is already on the road behind you."

- **6-tick Clock:** standard pressure

  > "The village grows suspicious; someone will eventually talk."

- **8-tick Clock:** slow burn

  > "The local Choir cell is building influence and resources."

Director tip: In a duet game, Clocks resolve fast. Err toward **smaller Clocks** unless you specifically want a long arc (like an 8-tick **Choir Node Awakening** or **Chapterhouse Sanctity Eroding**).

How Clocks Advance

Advance Clocks when the fiction supports it. Common triggers:

- **On a Loss:** tick 1–2 ticks (depending on severity).
- **On a Lesser Win:** tick 1, or tick a different related Clock as the "cost."
- **On loud choices:** public violence, obvious Faith/Sorcery in front of witnesses, burning bodies in broad daylight, smashing gates.
- **On delay:** waiting, repeated attempts, long rests in unsafe areas, lingering too long in Choir-touched territory.
- **On neglect:** untreated injuries, unburied bodies, failing to repair gear, ignoring debts or promises, leaving undead un-consecrated.

Strong Wins can **reduce pressure**:

- A decisive Win may **reduce a Clock**, pause it, or shift it into a different kind of problem (e.g., you escape pursuit, but now **Exposure** rises because witnesses saw your flight).

What Happens at Completion (Make the End Real)

When a Clock fills, **something concrete happens** in the fiction.

Examples:

- A Choir **patrol arrives** at your camp or the village.
- **Weather breaks** into a lethal storm; travel becomes a hazard.
- A **node awakens** below the crypt; undead stir en masse.
- Your **oath is called in** by the Chapterhouse or local Church.
- The **price on your head** becomes official.
- The scent trail of your mounts is confirmed and **hunters pick it up**.

Avoid vague results like "you take –10 forever." Clocks should culminate in **events and changed circumstances**, not permanent flat penalties.

What Clocks Represent in This Setting

Clocks often stand in for opponents you **can't just stab**:

- weather over open marches and mountain passes

- rumor and witnesses in villages and cities
- the fragility of **hospitality and sanctuary**
- **Choir interest**, informers, and inquisitors
- **Supply strain** and mount wear
- **Corruption pressure** and the Grave Star's spiritual gravity
- old enemies stirring—nobles, bandit bands, rival Rals, fallen Companions

They keep the campaign tense even when no one is actively swinging a weapon.

Common Clocks in *The Order of Ral*

Below are core Clocks tuned to this module. Each includes: what it represents, what ticks it, and what happens at full.

A) Pursuit Closing (4–6 ticks)

Represents:
Hunters, Choir patrols, rival knights, or beasts gaining ground on you.

Tick when:

- you make noise (explosions, bells, screaming, war-horse thunder)
- you leave clear tracks (burned wagons, dead Choir, distinctive Ral sign)
- you delay while in hostile territory
- you suffer **Loss** in travel or chase scenes
- you use obvious Faith or Sorcery where someone might talk about it

At full: **Contact.**

- Ambush in a lane, interception at the ford, siege of your temporary refuge, or forced chase.
- You don't necessarily die—but you no longer control the when and where of conflict.

Notes:
Pairs well with an **Escape** Clock during active chases.

B) Exposure / Attention (6 ticks)

Represents:
Witnesses connecting your presence to trouble; rumor turning into a usable trail.

Tick when:

- you're seen clearly; people note your armor, your horse, your title
- you give your name freely or are forced to sign or swear
- you leave identifiable signs (Chapterhouse symbols, unique tactics, calling cards)
- you act strangely in public (open necromancy, interrogations at sword-point)

At full:

- A named group knows who you are (or thinks they do) and begins acting:
  - local lord posts a **bounty**,
  - Choir inquisitors are dispatched,
  - Church remnants call you for questioning,
  - sanctuary is suddenly less welcoming.

Director cue:
Exposure does not always mean combat.
It often means doors close, tongues wag, and your next Hearth Rest is compromised.

C) Weather Breaking (4–6 ticks)

Represents:
Storm, freezing rain, fog wall, blizzard, heat wave—conditions turning dangerous.

Tick when:

- you delay travel while signs of bad weather are clear
- you camp exposed on ridges, open fields, or ruined towers
- you fail **Endurance / Wilderness Survival** rolls related to navigation and shelter
- you push routes that tempt the sky (high passes, sea cliffs, marsh flats)

At full:

- The weather becomes an **active hazard**:
    - travel checks now risk Wounds,
    - visibility drops (harm to Archery, Awareness),
    - fires struggle to stay lit,
    - exposure becomes a serious and ongoing threat.

Use this to force choices: seek shelter (and new social complications) or press on and risk harm.

D) Supply Strain (6 ticks)

Represents:
Food, lamp oil, dry cloth, rope integrity, mount condition, and small necessities slipping away.

Tick when:

- you **Hard Push** travel (forced marches, no proper rest)
- you linger wet and cold without proper campcraft
- you lose gear in fights, floods, or panicked retreats
- you feed or arm others from your limited stock
- you ignore minor hints ("we're low on bandages," "this is our last oil flask")

At full:
A **concrete shortage** hits:

- no oil for lamps (you're in the dark),
- rope snaps at a key climb,
- the war-horse's shoes are ruined,
- rations are gone, forcing a trade, theft, or starvation scene.

This is an engine for **hard choices**, not bookkeeping for its own sake.

E) Rot / Infection Setting In (4–6 ticks)

Represents:
Dirty wounds, prolonged damp and cold, sickness, and the way the Grave Star seems to make everything fester faster.

Tick when:

- injuries go untreated or poorly treated
- Camp Rests are miserable (soaked, freezing, surrounded by rot)
- you sleep in plague houses, crypts, or tainted soil without precautions
- the Protagonist pushes hard while already Wounded

At full:
A significant complication:

- a Wound worsens or refuses to downgrade,
- fevers strike during a mission,

- you're forced into a **recovery detour** (sanctuary, healer, Chapterhouse infirmary),
- or existing harm escalates along your normal Wound logic.

Important:
Use this to **force dramatic choices**, not as a way to stall the game at "sick in bed" forever.

F) Choir Node Awakening (6–8 ticks)

Represents:
A latent Choir site or Grave Star node stirring toward full activity.

Tick when:

- you linger too long in a tainted area (crypt, battlefield, plague district)
- Sorcery is used repeatedly near an old altar or buried rite-site
- you ignore small signs: whispered hymns in the stones, bone dust shifting, star-shaped mold
- Choir agents work unopposed in the region

At full:
The node **wakes**:

- undead rise en masse,
- ambient Corruption spikes,
- Sorcery becomes more volatile,
- you may be facing a full **node event**: minor boss, ritual climax, or area-wide hazard.

G) Chapterhouse Sanctity Strain (6–8 ticks)

Represents:
The spiritual and social strain on your base: overuse of grim methods, neglected rites, political entanglements, and the slow seep of despair.

Tick when:

- you bring tainted relics home and fail to cleanse them
- you repeatedly use Sorcery in sacred spaces without proper penance
- you neglect sanctifying rites, memorials for the fallen, or hospitality duties
- you leverage Chapterhouse resources ruthlessly without giving anything back

At full:

- Sanctity drops a tier,
- Faith tests in the Chapterhouse suffer,
- ghosts and restless dead may begin to manifest,
- or key NPCs lose heart, leave, or turn against the Order.

Pairing Clocks (Two-Clock Patterns That Work)

Use **paired Clocks** to create layered pressure without extra rules.

"Hunted on the Road"

- **Pursuit Closing + Weather Breaking**
  You can outrun people, but not the sky. Do you push your mounts through the storm or slow to seek shelter and risk being found?

"Safe Walls, Unsafe Welcome"

- **Exposure / Attention + Chapterhouse Sanctity Strain**
  You've found a refuge, but rumor and politics seep in. The more loudly you act, the more your own allies question what you've become.

"Help from a Prince with Teeth"

- **Oath Debt Coming Due** (custom Clock) + **Exposure / Attention**
  Aid becomes obligation; obligation becomes politics. You get troops or sanctuary now, but the price will be called in—and everyone will know.

"**Starving Quietly**"

- **Supply Strain** + **Rot / Infection Setting In**
  If you steal, you'll be seen. If you don't, the Companions weaken and the next fight may kill them. Either way, the squeeze tightens.

Using Clocks with Win / Lesser Win / Loss

Clocks are your cleanest, most visible "**cost**" **tool**.

- **Win:**
  - reduce or pause a Clock,
  - or gain a buffer ("you break line-of-sight; Pursuit Closing pauses for now").
- **Lesser Win:**
  - you succeed, but **tick a Clock**—often the best, simplest consequence.
  - e.g., you escape with the relic, but Exposure/Attention advances.
- **Loss:**
  - tick harder (2 ticks),
  - or tick two related Clocks by 1 each.

Director tip:
When unsure what cost to apply on a Lesser Win, **tick a Clock**. It keeps the story moving and makes pressure visible instead of hidden.

Making Clocks Visible to the Player

In duet play, showing Clocks improves pacing and trust.

- Show the Protagonist the **Clock title** and its current ticks.
- Be clear **what triggers it**.
- Be clear **what happens when it fills**.

Exception:
If a Clock represents **secret plotting** (e.g., "**Hidden Choir Cell Influence**"), you can keep the exact details hidden while still showing that *something* is rising in the background.

Practical table method:
Use a single die in the open to represent a Clock (**d4, d6, d8**). Start at "1" and advance the face as the Clock ticks. Let the Ral watch the numbers creep and decide where they want to bleed, burn Destiny, or bargain to push those numbers back down.

In a world watched by a dead star, **Clocks are how you measure how much night you have left before it looks directly at you.**

Chapter 6: Bestiary & Adversaries

How Creature Wounds Work

Use the normal One-on-One combat flow for everything: roll to hit, compute Edge, roll damage, subtract DR, convert to a Wound Tier as usual. The only shortcut is how you track that result for monsters.

The Wounds value on a creature is its "meaningful hits" track. You don't track Light/Medium/Severe separately for most NPCs.

Each time an attack would inflict at least a Light Wound (after DR), mark 1 Wound off the creature.

If the hit would qualify as a Severe or Critical Wound on a PC (big Damage Score / high Edge), you may mark 2 Wounds instead.

At 0 Wounds, the creature is out of the fight: dead, destroyed, routed, or otherwise removed, as fits the fiction.

Tough "boss" foes can still use full PC-style wound tiers if you want more detail, but for most enemies, just spend the Wounds track as above and let the fiction describe how ugly each hit looks.

HUMANS & MORTAL FOES

Village Militia Spearman

Threat 1, **Defense** 40%, **DR** 1 (gambeson), **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Spear Thrust 45% (1d8), Shove with Haft 40% (1d6, often control only)
Traits:

- Poorly Drilled; Fearful of Undead (Disadvantage on first round vs obvious undead)
- Knows Local Paths (+10 Tracking/Streetwise to avoid them in their own village)

A village militia spearman is a farmer or cooper with a spear and a handful of drills. They stand where the reeve tells them, palms blistered, armor thin, eyes fixed on the Ral's plate because looking at the undead across the field is worse. They fight in small knots around a banner, more out of shame than courage, and often break as soon as the first friend falls.

Ral Protagonists meet militia most often when passing through frightened towns where rumor outruns truth—these are not enemies to slaughter unless the Choir has had time to talk to them first.

Town Watchman

Threat 1, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Short Sword 50% (1d8), Club 45% (1d6, +10 to nonlethal attempts)
Traits:

- Night Patrol (+10 Awareness in darkness)
- Narrow Street Fighting (+10 Defense in tight alleys)
- Bribable (Director may allow Persuasion/Deception to remove them from a scene entirely)

Town watchmen are tired men and women who have seen too many tavern brawls and not enough real war. They know every alley, which door hides a smuggler, which roofline gives a good vantage. They are far more dangerous in their own streets than in open fields.

Their first instinct when a Ral arrives is to get out of the way of whatever the Order is hunting. Their second is to wonder what it will cost the town.

Desperate Brigand

Threat 1, **Defense** 40%, **DR** 0–1 (ragged leathers), **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Rusty Blade 45% (1d8), Sling Stone 40% (1d6)
Traits:

- Ambush at the Tree Line (+10 to first attack from concealment)
- Flee When Bloodied (often withdraw at Medium Wounds)
- Choir-Tempted (Director may flag some as low-grade cult prospects)

Brigands are the flotsam of ruined campaigns and failed harvests. They haunt crossroads, half-collapsed bridges, and the edges of pilgrim roads, trying to take enough to live without drawing too much attention from either lords or Choir.

They are not looking to fight a Ral; if they realize who they've accosted before steel speaks, most will scatter into the hedgerows. The truly desperate may stand, and sometimes Athrakar finds his next convert in whoever survives.

Highway Cutthroat

Threat 2, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Dagger Flurry 55% (1d6+2), Garrote 50% (1d6, often control), Crossbow Ambush 45% (1d10)
Traits:

- Strike from Behind (Advantage on first attack from surprise)
- Kill Witnesses (aims for messengers and priests first)
- No Stomach for Corpses (Disadvantage vs obviously undead)

Cutthroats are professionals in a world that no longer needs honest trades. They choose the blind corner or the dip in the road where sightlines vanish, then go for the throat of the richest-looking traveler.

Against a Ral, their precision and planning collide with a reality they were never trained to handle: a victim who does not choke quite right and whose blood runs slow. Many cutthroats break when they realize the "armored pilgrim" is already dead.

Mercenary Man-at-Arms

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2 (mail, shield), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Arming Sword 60% (1d10), Shield Bash 55% (1d8, may inflict Knockdown), Javelin 45% (1d8)
Traits:

- Formation Fighter (+10 Defense when adjacent to ally)
- Weigh the Purse (may stand down if paid or outmatched)
- War-Weary (morale checks at Disadvantage vs overwhelming undead horrors)

Mercenary men-at-arms sell their loyalty by the season. They have seen real battle, understand when lines are about to break, and know that no pay is worth being eaten by ghouls.

They fight well in small companies and make dangerous foes when hired by petty lords trying to resist the Choir—or by Choir cells rich enough to buy blades.

Hedge Knight

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 3 (plate scraps + mail), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Longsword 60% (1d10+2), Lance Charge 55% (1d12 from Near, if mounted), Dagger 50% (1d6)
Traits:

- Duelist Pride (may insist on single combat; +10 when in formal duel)
- Poor Horseflesh (mount often inferior unless noted)
- Hungry for Renown (Persuasion/Intimidation can steer them into or out of fights)

Hedge knights roam half-fallen realms looking for tourneys that no longer exist and lords who can still afford them. They wear patched plate and boast of glories from wars no one remembers.

Their reaction to a Ral varies: some see a kind of blasphemous mirror and charge, eager to prove that living steel is still better. Others bow stiffly and get out of the way, not wanting their names scratched into the same walls as the dead.

Broken Knight-Errant

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 3, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Greatsword 65% (2d8), Crushing Pommel 55% (1d8, can inflict Stun at Director's call), Shieldless Counter 60% (1d10+2)
Traits:

- Reckless Assault (+10 to attack when already Wounded; –10 Defense same round)
- Haunted by Failures (often tied to past Choir victory)
- Might-Have-Been Ral (Director may use as a narrative foil)

A broken knight-errant has lived through something that should have killed him: a lost siege, a Choir purge, a plague ward gone wrong. He wanders now with too much skill and not enough purpose, picking fights with anything he recognizes as evil—or as a reflection of his own failure.

When such a knight meets a Ral, the clash is almost always personal. He sees in the death-knight what he refused to become, and either begs for a place among them or tries to prove the rite was never needed.

Fanatic Penitent

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 1 (scourged leathers), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Spiked Flail 55% (1d10), Barbed Whip 55% (1d8, can impose Disadvantage from pain), Frenzied Grapple 50% (1d6, control)
Traits:

- Ignore Pain (first Light Wound ignored for penalties)
- Holy or Heretic (may serve Church or Choir splinter)
- Unafraid of Rals (no special Fear penalties vs undead)

Flagellants, self-scourgers, and barefoot penitents trail both armies and Choir processions. Some lash themselves in hopes of turning away the Grave Star; others embrace Athrakar as the only god still listening.

They are terrifyingly willing to die—for the wrong reason, usually in the wrong place. Their presence can turn a simple street fight into a bloody spectacle as they throw themselves into danger to prove a point to a god who is probably not listening.

Grave-Robber

Threat 1, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 0, **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Shovel 45% (1d8), Knife 45% (1d6)
Traits:

- Tomb Sense (+10 to notice grave hazards and disturbed earth)
- Coward at Heart (Disadvantage on morale vs obvious superior foes)
- Too Close to the Dead (higher chance to carry minor Corruption or curses)

Grave-robbers thrive where poverty meets superstition. They slip between burial mounds and chapel yards under clouded moons, prizing rings from swollen fingers and breaking open old coffins for a handful of coins.

They encounter *the Order of Ral* more often than they'd like: Rals spend a great deal of time in and around graves. Sometimes grave-robbers become informants; sometimes they end up as examples. Either way, they know where the Choir has shown interest long before anyone else.

Witch-Hunter

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2 (layered leathers & mail), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Arming Sword 60% (1d10), Pistol/Crossbow 55% (1d10), Sanctified Brand 50% (1d8, may inflict extra vs Sorcerers/undead at Director's option)
Traits:

- Monster Lore (+10 Lore: Arcane/Kingdoms vs cults and creatures)
- Relic Tools (tangles, chains, brands; +10 to capture rather than kill)
- Dangerous Zeal (may misjudge Rals, Companions, or Faith casters as heretics)

Some remnants of the old Church train witch-hunters to chase Sorcery and Choir rites. They are methodical, ruthless, and only half-welcome in most towns. Rals are an uncomfortable problem: sanctioned undeath is a heresy many witch-hunters can barely stomach.

Allies in some stories, antagonists in others, witch-hunters bring fire, stakes, and suspicion wherever they go. The Choir hates them, but also finds them very easy to twist when they begin to see Athrakar's work as "necessary purification."

Pilgrim Mob

Threat 2, **Defense** 30%, **DR** 0–1, **Wounds** 4 (as a group)
Attacks: Stones & Staves 50% (1d8, swarm), Trample 45% (1d10, vs prone)
Traits:

- Many Bodies, One Mind (treat as single creature until "broken")
- Panic Easily (morale checks at Disadvantage), Swayed by Spectacle (+10 Persuasion/Intimidation to sway them with obvious miracles or atrocities)

Pilgrims walk in ragged clusters toward shrines that may not be guarded anymore, carrying bones, candles, and old songs. In desperate times, a mob of pilgrims can become a weapon—either in the Church's hand or the Choir's.

They are not individually dangerous, but as a press of bodies they can drag down a Ral, block streets, or overwhelm weaker foes. The real threat is what happens to them afterward: whoever survives will tell the story in every tavern for a week.

Manor Guard Archer

Threat 2, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 1–2, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Short Bow 60% (1d8), Dagger 45% (1d6)
Traits:

- Murder-Hole Training (+10 to hit from prepared positions)
- Protect the Lord (+10 vs targets threatening their employer)
- Poor vs Undead (Disadvantage if arrows obviously failing to stop undead)

Manor archers defend petty lords and their hoards from raiders, tax riots, and neighbors. They are drilled in volley fire and killing from behind stone rather than standing in open fields.

When the Choir comes, they are often the first to die in burning gatehouses. When *the Order of Ral* arrives, they have to decide quickly whether they serve a lord who will resist or one who has already sold them to the Grave Star.

Crossbow Levy

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Crossbow Bolt 60% (1d10), Butt-Strike 45% (1d6)
Traits:

- Slow Reload (may only fire every other round without special kit)
- Armor-Breaker (+2 damage vs heavily armored targets)
- Skittish (often break when charged by undead or Rals)

Crossbow levies are common in towns too poor for regular soldiers. They are terrifying at the first volley—especially against knights—but become far less reassuring when the enemy keeps walking.

Against a Ral, their bolts hit hard, but the sight of their prey still coming, bolt jutting from plate, is often what sends them running.

Outlaw Captain

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Sabre 65% (1d10+2), Off-Hand Dagger 60% (1d6, can add +2 damage when used in tandem), Command Shout (Director: grants +10 to allies' next attack)
Traits:

- Ambush Planner (+10 to set up favorable terrain)
- Makes Examples (may kill prisoners to break morale)
- Choir-Touched (some carry minor star sigils or pacts)

Outlaw captains herd the desperate into bands that can rival small armies. They know how to use fear, hunger, and opportunity to keep their rabble in line. Some have already made quiet arrangements with local Choir cells—offering bodies and chaos in return for protection.

Rals facing an outlaw captain must decide whether to shatter the band or cut off its head and try to turn what's left into something less monstrous.

Battle-Mad Raider

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Axe 65% (1d10+2), Shield Hook 55% (1d8, can Disarm/Trip), Frenzied Charge 60% (1d12, first round only)
Traits:

- Battle Trance (ignores fear penalties; keeps fighting at Severe Wound)
- Hard to Intimidate (Intimidation suffers –10)
- Choir Bait (Choir loves recruiting from survivors of such bands)

Raiders ride or march out of burned hinterlands where law has collapsed entirely. They are brutal, often drunk on their own legends, and strangely attractive recruits for both the Church's worst schemes and the Choir's open atrocities.

They'll attack a Ral not because it's wise but because it is *famous*. If they survive the encounter, they are never quite the same again.

CHOIR OF THE GRAVE STAR: CULTISTS & ELITES

Choir Acolyte

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 0–1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Ritual Knife 50% (1d6), Grave-Flare 45% (1d8, Essence-based)
Traits:

- Low Cant (minor Choir hymns: impose –10 on nearby Faith checks)

- Fragile Loyalty (may break under heavy intimidation or proof Athrakar "failed" them)
- Useful Prisoner (+10 Lore/Interrogation tests vs Choir)

Choir acolytes are the first rung on Athrakar's ladder. They scrub floors in bone chapels, learn hymns that sour the air, and practice cutting throats in keeping with complex diagrams no one else understands.

They are not formidable alone, but rarely alone. Where one stands, a Cantor or Precentor is usually not far behind.

Grave Star Cantor

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1–2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Staff 55% (1d8), Harmonic Hex 60% (1d10, Essence-based, may inflict Disadvantage on next action), Command the Dead (Director: buff undead within hearing)
Traits:

- Battle Hymn (can grant +10 to allied undead Defense or attacks while chanting)
- Choir Focus (killing them may stun nearby cultists)
- Vulnerable to Disruption (Faith workings and loud counter-song can impose Disadvantage)

Cantors are the Choir's battlefield hymn-singers. Their voices knit undead into ranks, time spear-thrusts, and carry Athrakar's cold into the marrow of anyone who listens too long.

A Ral who does not prioritize the Cantor will find even a sloppy group of corpses suddenly fighting like drilled soldiers.

Bone-Script Scribe

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 0–1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Stylus Stab 45% (1d6), Ink-Flung Hex 50% (1d8, Essence-based; often control effects)
Traits:

- Glyphworker (+10 to any ritual involving sigils, wards, bone-script)
- Coward (attempts to flee if frontline approached)
- Dangerous Texts (capturing their books may yield Lore—and Corruption risk)

Bone-scribes etch sigils into skulls, bells, and chapel walls until the world itself begins to hum with the Grave Star. Their tools are needles, inks, and the patient cruelty of someone who believes every line they carve is for "order."

They rarely fight if they can avoid it; their real threat is in what they leave behind—patterns that keep working long after their hands are cold.

Plague-Deacon

Threat 3, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Blight Touch 60% (1d8 plus disease effect at Director's call), Mace 55% (1d10), Plague Chant 55% (1d8 to clustered targets, Essence-based)
Traits:

- Walking Infection (prolonged contact may inflict disease)
- Immunity to Fear (no penalties vs undead/Rals)
- Promise of "Mercy" (may sway desperate NPCs with talk of peaceful stillness)

Plague-deacons are the Choir's answer to healers: priests who "ease suffering" by folding the sick into Athrakar's quiet. They oversee contagion rites, organize corpse carts, and bless wells in ways that have nothing to do with purity.

Where a plague-deacon walks, the line between hospice and charnel ground wears thin.

Choir Knight

Threat 4, **Defense** 65%, **DR** 3–4, **Wounds** 5
Attacks: Star-Blazoned Sword 70% (1d12+2), Shield of Silent Faith 65% (1d10, may Disarm/Knockback), Mounted Lance 65% (2d8 from Near when mounted)
Traits:

- Fanatical (no morale checks; fights to Quietus unless commanded)
- Aura of Dread (–10 Intimidation vs them; +10 Intimidation from them)
- Rival to the Rals (ideal for mirror duels)

Choir knights are Athrakar's answer to *the Order of Ral*—elite warriors wrapped in pale plate etched with grave-stars. Some are still technically alive; others are "stilled" in partial undeath, walking prototypes for the world Athrakar promises.

They are among the few foes who can meet a Ral's charge head-on and occasionally win.

Pallid Inquisitor

Threat 4, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2–3, **Wounds** 5
Attacks: Hooked Blade 65% (1d10+2), Chains of Inquiry 60% (1d8, control; can Pin or Disarm), Interrogator's Gaze 55% (social attack; may break morale or reveal secrets)
Traits:

- Mind Games (+10 vs social Contests in interrogation scenes)
- Torturer's Kit (on capture, can inflict long-term consequences)
- Choir Authority (+10 to command other cultists)

Pallid inquisitors hunt down wavering brothers and troublesome heretics inside the Choir's own ranks—and beyond. They drag their victims into basements and bell-towers, extracting confessions and new patterns in equal measure.

Facing one is as much a social and moral battle as a physical one, especially if they arrive with pamphlets of "truth" and a list of accusations that are not entirely wrong.

Grave Star Precentor

Threat 5, **Defense** 65%, **DR** 2–3, **Wounds** 6
Attacks: Ritual Staff 65% (1d10+2), Star-Shear 70% (2d8, Essence-based, high Corruption risk in the area), Command Shadows (Director: animates or empowers shadow-creatures)
Traits:

- Node-Master (can sense and manipulate local Choir infrastructures)
- Strategic Withdrawal (will flee if losing, to call down larger responses)
- Boss of a Cell (brings followers, undead, and rituals prepared)

Precentors design the tests that villages like Greybarrow are subjected to. They understand patterns at a terrifying scale, seeing people as notes in a choir spread across miles.

They are too valuable to risk lightly; when they appear in person, something important is at stake. Killing one may save hundreds, but it also draws attention from even colder minds higher up the Choir ladder.

Choir Bell-Ringer

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Hammer 50% (1d8), Sonic Peal 55% (1d6 in area, Essence-based; often causes Disadvantage or

environmental effects)
Traits:

- Control the Soundscape (can start/stop bells to trigger Clocks)
- Alarm Net (+10 to raise reinforcements early)
- Fragile But Central (smart foes target them to break coordination)

Bell-ringers control more than simple alarms in Choir sites. Their bells mark ritual phases, coordinate patrols, and sometimes carry micro-hymns that strengthen undead or sap courage.

A bell-ringer on a tower with a clear view can turn a quiet infiltration into a frantic siege with one pull of a rope.

Grave-Chain Warden

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 3, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Chain Lash 60% (1d10, can Grapple at Director's call), Spiked Gauntlet 55% (1d8), Drag to the Pit 50% (control; moves target toward hazard)
Traits:

- Jailor of the Damned (often guarding key prisoners or relics)
- Chain Tricks (+10 to grapples, trips, pulls)
- Hard to Flee From(Disadvantage on escape attempts within their reach)

Grave-chain wardens enforce the Choir's will in dungeons, pits, and ossuaries. They love shackles, pit traps, and any situation where their opponent's movement can be controlled.

Rals encountering them often do so in tight spaces where the chains have every advantage—and where one wrong step means being dragged into star-scribed pits.

UNDEAD & RESTLESS DEAD

Shambling Corpse

Threat 1, **Defense** 30%, **DR** 1 (rotting flesh/armor), **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Claw or Bite 45% (1d8)
Traits:

- Mindless (no fear; simple commands)
- Slow (often suffers Disadvantage vs fast foes)
- Disease Carrier (Director may inflict disease on bites)

Fresh or half-rotten corpses animated by crude Choir rites or wild Grave Star influence. They shamble, they grab, they bite, and they pull down the unwary.

Alone, they are nuisances. In numbers or in tight spaces, they suffocate defenses.

Graveyard Skeleton

Threat 1, **Defense** 40%, **DR** 1 (bone), **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Rusty Weapon 50% (1d8), Bony Claws 45% (1d6)
Traits:

- Hard to Stop (immune to some mundane fears and pains)
- Brittle (blunt weapons gain +2 damage)
- Silent March (harder to hear coming on stone)

Skeletons are the Choir's simplest "clean" undead—no rot, less smell, easier to stack. They clatter up from old graves, pried free by bone-scribes and Cantors.

They fall apart satisfyingly when hit hard, which is one of the few pleasures still left to some Rals.

Hungry Ghoul

Threat 2, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Raking Claws 60% (1d8+2), Gnawing Bite 55% (1d8, may inflict infection or paralysis at Director's call)
Traits:

- Grave Tunneler (+10 Stealth/Tracking in graveyards and barrows)
- Corpse Addiction (drawn to mass graves)
- Pack Hunter (Advantage when attacking a surrounded target)

Ghouls are what happens when hunger persists beyond death. They crawl through graveyards and plague trenches, feeding until their fingers wear to claws and their teeth to fangs.

Some Choir rites encourage ghoul creation to "clean" battlefields. *The Order of Ral* spends too much time cleaning what the ghouls leave behind.

Plague Wight

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Withering Grip 60% (1d10+2), Pestilent Breath 55% (1d8 in small cone, disease-laden)
Traits:

- Aura of Illness (nearby living must test or suffer fatigue/sickness penalties)
- Resistant to Mundane Weapons (non-blessed, non-heavy hits do –2 damage)
- Hatred of Healers (+10 attacks vs medics/Faith casters)

Plague wights are the distilled malice of entire epidemics, coalesced around a single corpse who died badly and was claimed by Athrakar.

Their presence turns clean air into a fever dream. If left unchecked, a wight can soften a city for Choir occupation without a single living priest setting foot inside the walls.

Barrow Wraith

Threat 4, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2 (incorporeal resistance), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Soul-Chill Touch 65% (1d10+2, often bypasses normal armor at Director's call), Death Moan 55% (morale attack; can cause Fear)
Traits:

- Incorporeal (hard to hurt without magick/Faith; some attacks pass through)
- Bound to Site (tied to barrow or grave circle)
- Memory Eater (may know secrets of those buried nearby)

Barrow wraiths are the lingering will of ancient dead bound to sites of old wars or betrayals. The Choir often prods them into obedience, using them to guard nodes.

They are terrifying for ordinary people and still troublesome for a Ral—especially if the Protagonist cares about the stories the wraith remembers.

Bound Shade

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Shadow Grip 60% (1d8, control; restrains targets), Whisper of Regret 55% (can impose Disadvantage on next roll)
Traits:

- Anchored to Object/Person (destroying the anchor destroys or frees it)
- Half-Seen (Stealthy in darkness)
- Exploitable (can sometimes be bargained with or redirected)

A bound shade is the fragment of a person tied to a locket, a room, or a specific sin. The Choir prefers to

bind shades to bells and shrines; the Church sometimes does the same in less honest ways.

Shades make excellent alarm systems, but when the anchor changes hands, so do they.

Grave Shadow

Threat 3, **Defense** 65%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Draining Touch 65% (1d10+2, often attacks Essence or Attributes at Director's call)
Traits:

- Lives in Darkness (Advantage in shadows, Disadvantage in bright light)
- Shadow-Step (may reposition across dimly lit zones)
- Hates Ral Presence (drawn to them like flies to carrion)

Grave shadows are not ghosts of people so much as ghosts of **events** — the darkness left behind when something awful happened and the air never quite recovered.

They slip along walls, cling to wells and ossuaries, and often notice a Ral long before anyone else does.

Hollow-Helm (Animated Armor)

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 3–4, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Heavy Blade 60% (1d10+2), Shield Slam 55% (1d8, can knock prone), Iron Grasp 50% (1d8, grappling)
Traits:

- No Flesh, No Fear (immune to many mental effects)
- Vulnerable Joints (+2 damage from precise aimed strikes)
- Uncanny Stillness (hard to distinguish from inert armor until it moves)

Hollow-helms are full suits of armor animated by bound shades or low Choir rites. They stand in chapels, halls, or tombs like normal decorations—until they don't.

They make eerie mirrors for the Rals, empty shells pretending to be knights with nothing inside but cold orders.

Mass Grave Swarm

Threat 4, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 5
Attacks: Swarming Hands 65% (2d6, many small harms), Drag Under 60% (control; pulls prone or into pits)
Traits:

- Swarm Body (harder to hurt with single-target attacks; area effects do extra)
- Horror of Numbers (fear checks at Disadvantage when first encountered)
- Tied to Site (rarely moves far from original trench)

When too many bodies are dumped into one place without ritual or care, the Grave Star sometimes answers by knitting their hands and hunger together into one crawling mass.

Facing a mass grave swarm is like fighting the guilt of an entire war with a sword.

BEASTS & TAINTED WILDLIFE

Grey Wolf Pack-Hunter

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Bite 60% (1d8), Pack Harass 55% (1d6, can impose Disadvantage on target vs other wolves)
Traits:

- Pack Tactics (+10 when flanking or outnumbering)

- Flee from Star-Taint (often avoid heavy Choir sites)
- Good Judges of Men (Director may have them react kindly or aggressively based on Protagonist's past deeds)

Wolves in this age are thinner, hungrier, and far more used to human corpses than they should be. They patrol the edges of battlefields and plague-routes, sometimes trailing the Order's movements like silent witnesses.

Some villages trust their howls more than church bells.

Tainted Grave Wolf

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Corrupted Bite 65% (1d10+2, may inflict disease or minor Corruption), Grave Howl 60% (morale attack; can scatter animals and shake humans)
Traits:

- Star-Marked Eyes (faint pale gleam; sees well in Grave Star-lit nights)
- Corpse-Eater (Advantage when attacking wounded or downed targets)
- Skittish in Sanctified Ground (Disadvantage near strong Faith auras)

These wolves have fed too long on the dead of Choir experiments or star-sick fields. Their fur falls out in patches, their eyes gleam with wrong light, and their breath mist smells like old graves.

They are not servants of Athrakar—just proof of his reach.

Trained War Dog

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1 (studded harness), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Bite 60% (1d8), Hamstring Lunge 55% (1d8, can inflict Knockdown)
Traits:

- Trained to Brace (+10 to hold lines or pull down fleeing foes)
- Loyal to Handler (will fight past fear if handler is alive)
- Fear of Undead (initial Disadvantage vs undead unless specifically trained)

War dogs serve lords, mercenary companies, and sometimes witch-hunters. They are used to screams, steel, and marching boots, but still balk at certain smells—rot, for instance, or star-touched chill.

A Ral who treats a war dog with unexpected gentleness tends to be remembered long after the battle.

Plague Rat Swarm

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Bites & Claws 60% (2d6, many small wounds), Overrun 55% (control; can knock prone or stagger)
Traits:

- Swarm Body (area attacks are more effective)
- Carries Disease (high chance of contagion if bitten)
- Follows Filth and Choir (often present in Choir-infested districts)

Rat swarms are living tides of filth and desperation. They boil out of sewers and grain stores, spreading more than panic wherever they pass.

Sometimes the Choir encourages them as a form of subtle siege—sending disease into a town for weeks before a single priest arrives.

Carrion Crow Murder

Threat 1, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 0, **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Pecks & Claws 55% (1d6), Eye-Strike 50% (1d6, may blind on high Edge at Director's call)
Traits:

- Murder of Witnesses (will gather at future battlefields before anyone else)
- Omen Flock (can be used by Director as foreboding)
- Easily Scattered (fire, loud noise give Advantage against them)

Crows have always followed war. In this age, they seem to know where the Choir plans to move before the Choir does.

They are rarely direct threats, but a sudden, unnatural gathering or departure of crows is worth a Ral's notice.

Blighted Boar

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Gore Charge 65% (2d8), Tusking Swipe 60% (1d10), Trample 55% (1d10 vs prone)
Traits:

- Pain-Blind (ignores first Light Wound penalties)
- Infection-Tusks (may cause festering wounds)
- Unpredictable (Director can have it lash out at any side)

Blighted boars wander battlefields and cursed woods, feeding on things no animal should eat. Their hides thicken, their tusks blacken, and their eyes glaze with a madness that isn't entirely natural.

They can turn a tense stand-off into chaos with a single unexpected charge.

Star-Marked Stag

Threat 3, **Defense** 65%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Antler Thrust 60% (1d10), Hoof Strike 55% (1d8)
Traits:

- Grave Star's Favor (may appear around Choir sites as a "sign")
- Not Quite Natural (Awareness/Scholar may notice unusual behavior)
- Talisman Source (antlers, hide, or blood may be used in powerful rites—for good or ill)

Star-marked stags have faint pale sigils in their fur or antlers that only show under certain skies. Some see them as Athrakar's beasts; others as victims of his reach.

Killing one can bring luck or curses, depending on who's telling the story.

Chapel Owl

Threat 1, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 0, **Wounds** 2
Attacks: Talons 50% (1d6), Blinding Swoop 55% (1d4, often control)
Traits:

- Watcher of Ruins (+10 Awareness in abandoned chapels)
- Sensitive to Choir (flies away from strong Grave Star sites)
- Potential Familiar (could bond with Faith or Scholar types)

Owls nest in broken chapels and watch Rals pass through their territory with unnervingly steady gazes. They are not threats; they are mirrors of the world's quiet, tattered dignity.

Sometimes they shriek just before something awful steps out of the dark.

Mire Leech Cluster

Threat 2, **Defense** 40%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Blood Drain 55% (1d6 per round attached), Swarm Latch 50% (control; attaches to limbs)
Traits:

- Water-Bound (rarely leaves marshes and bog pools)
- Silent Danger (often unnoticed until damage accrues)
- Weakens Slowly (treat as fatigue/END drain over time)

Leech clusters haunt bogs, ditches, and flooded trenches, turning slow retreats into waking nightmares as soldiers realize too late that something has been feeding.

In a world where blood is already cheap, few think twice about a few more drops—until they cannot stand.

Crypt Spider

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1, **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Venomous Bite 60% (1d8, poison possible), Web Cast 55% (control; immobilize)
Traits:

- Dark Nooks (+10 Stealth in crypts/ruins)
- Poison (may inflict paralysis or slow)
- Corpse-Egg Layers (eggs in bodies can create new encounters later)

Crypt spiders thrive in forgotten mausoleums and under-chapels, feeding on vermin and the occasional unlucky visitor. The Choir sometimes deliberately introduces them to tombs to "discourage" prying eyes.

Destroying them is easy; discovering where they laid eggs is not.

GREATER HORRORS & STAR-BORN THINGS

Grave Star Revenant

Threat 4, **Defense** 65%, **DR** 3, **Wounds** 5
Attacks: Greatblade 70% (2d8), Star-Flare Strike 60% (1d10+2, Essence-based), Grasp of the Grave 65% (1d8, control; can pin)
Traits:

- Bound to Vengeance (obsessed with a specific oath or enemy)
- Star-Hardened (resistant to Faith; some Faith tests suffer –10 vs it)
- Aura of Dread (–10 morale vs nearby mortals)

A grave star revenant is a champion who died in Choir service—or in defiance of it, then was claimed anyway. Its armor bears both old heraldry and fresh star-sigils, its eyes burning with cold purpose.

Facing one is like fighting what the Rals might become if the Order ever falls completely into Athrakar's orbit.

Ossuary Golem

Threat 4, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 4, **Wounds** 6
Attacks: Bone Fist 65% (2d8), Bone Shard Storm 55% (2d6 in small radius), Crush Underfoot 60% (1d10 vs prone or smaller targets)
Traits:

- Made of Many (resistant to small-arms damage; area/impact damage more effective)
- Slow but Relentless (rarely runs; keeps coming)
- Node Anchor (often central to a Choir infrastructure)

Built from thousands of bones and bound by bone-script and Precentor rites, an ossuary golem is not subtle. It guards vaults, node chambers, and central Choir laboratories.

It is a statement: "We own the dead here, and we will stack them as we please."

Choir Bone Colossus

Threat 5, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 4, **Wounds** 7
Attacks: Massive Slam 70% (2d10), Sweeping Limb 65% (2d8 in an arc), Bone Cage 60% (control; trap target inside rib-like structure)
Traits:

- Siege Engine (ideal for breaking gates and walls)
- Terror to Civilians (automatic panic in normal crowds)
- Vulnerable Joints (targeted attacks can reduce Threat or DR over time)

The bone colossus is the Choir's idea of a parade float: a towering mass of fused skeletons walking through a city that still remembers civic pride.

The Order of Ral cannot always destroy them outright, but even wounding one in public view is a blow to the Choir's claim of inevitability.

Corpse-Flood

Threat 4, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 3, **Wounds** 6
Attacks: Drowning Embrace 65% (2d8, can restrain), Torrential Rush 60% (2d6 in a wave, knockdown), Flesh-Slip 55% (creates difficult terrain)
Traits:

- Amorphous Mass (blunt/area better; pierce/slash less effective)
- Horrifying (fear/Corruption checks on first sight)
- Site-Born (usually formed in flooded crypts, plague pits, or Choir cisterns)

A corpse-flood is a failure or perverse success of Choir experiment: water, rot, and bodies turned into a single tidal entity.

It is not subtle, but it can wash through streets faster than most people can run.

Grave Lantern Ghost

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2, **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Burning Caress 60% (1d10, partly ignores mundane DR), Lantern Flare 55% (blind/Disadvantage), Soul-Draw 55% (can drain Essence)
Traits:

- Bound to Lantern or Flame (destroying or dousing the source weakens or frees it)
- Lures the Lost (may act as false guidance in fog or darkness)
- Ambivalent (can sometimes be appeased or redirected)

A grave lantern ghost is the soul of some unfortunate who died carrying light into a place that did not want it. Now the lantern's glow is wrong, drawing the living into danger.

Some Rals try to free them. Others simply smash the lantern and move on.

Bell-Tower Horror

Threat 4, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 3, **Wounds** 5
Attacks: Dangling Limbs 65% (2d6), Bell-Crash 60% (2d8 in radius below), Rope Snare 55% (control; pulls targets upward or leaves them hanging)
Traits:

- Fixed to Height (rarely leaves its tower)
- Sound-Shaping (can use bells for fear, confusion, or warnings)

- Horror of Repurposed Sanctity (killing it might also destroy the tower and bells)

In some towns, when the Choir takes the bells, they also take whoever was ringing them and whatever died in the tower. All of that can fuse into a single dangling, jangling horror that rings out Athrakar's praises in broken tones.

Slaying it is half exorcism, half demolition job.

Athrakar's Eye-Fragment

Threat 5, **Defense** 70%, **DR** 3, **Wounds** 6
Attacks: Star Gaze 75% (2d8, Essence/Corruption-heavy), Gravity Lurch 65% (2d6 and forced movement), Mind-Whisper 60% (mental/social attack; may inflict fear, despair, or compelled actions)
Traits:

- Manifestation of the Grave Star (strong Corruption field nearby)
- Warps Reality (Director may twist physics in its presence: odd light, weight shifts, clock distortions)
- Almost Untouchable (magick/Faith, relics, and Ral rites have Advantage vs it; mundane actions often suffer Disadvantage)

Sometimes, rarely, a Choir node or failed ritual tears a small "eye" of Athrakar into the world—a floating, pale, many-faceted presence that stares without eyelids and hums with impossibly distant choirs.

The Order of Ral does not "defeat" such things in any normal sense. They endure them, deflect them, bind them, or die buying enough time for someone else to close the wound.

SPECIAL ADVERSARIES

Cursed — Those Who Broke Before They Died

Not all monsters in the Grave Star's shadow were born in graveyards.

The Cursed were human once—farmers, soldiers, hedge-priests, midwives—caught too long in Athrakar's tainted light, Choir epidemics, or star-rites gone wrong. Where ordinary plague takes flesh and leaves corpses, the Grave Star takes *self* and leaves something that remembers just enough to hurt. A Cursed might still wear the remnants of their old life: a half-rotted tabard, a wedding charm, a militia badge nailed into warped skin. Underneath, bones have bent to new shapes, jaws split too wide, nails grown into claws, sometimes more beast than man… and sometimes not nearly beast *enough* to be merciful.

They are the tragedy line of the Bestiary: walking answers to the question "what happens when a soul breaks, but the body won't fall down." Some prowl the marches, loping on all fours like wolfsick things; others haunt the edges of villages, ashamed and hungry, listening to their family pray for the monster to go away without realizing whose voice still whimpers in its throat. A Ral looking at a Cursed sees a mirror held a little too close—this is what happens when the war against Athrakar is lost not in battle, but inside your own skull.

Grave-Hound Ravener

Threat 3, Defense 60%, DR 2, Wounds 4
Attacks: Rending Claws 65% (1d10), Maw of the Grave 55% (1d8; may force Infection/Corruption check), Pounce 55% (Close → Reach; may knock prone on Win)
Traits:

- **Half-Shifted:** Moves on all fours, limbs warped; gains +10 to Athletics/Stealth at night or in wreckage-strewn terrain.
- **Pack-Sense:** When fighting alongside other cursed or undead, gains +10 to attack the same target as an ally.

- **Echo of the Man:** On first contact, a Ravener may show a flash of memory—calling a name, hesitating near old haunts; a successful Faith / Persuasion Test can stagger it for one round (no action, Defense –10) as the human mind flickers.

Grave-Hound Raveners are not wolves who wear human flesh; they are humans whose bodies have been dragged toward a wolfish idea by the Grave Star's plague. The Choir does not always mean to make them—some are accidents, plague victims who lingered too long in half-finished rites—but once created, they are too useful to waste.

A Ravener's spine lengthens, its ribs splay, and its skull narrows into something almost canine without fully abandoning the human shape. The jaw splits farther than it should; fingers fuse into hooked, half-paw claws. It retains enough musculature to stand upright, but when excited—or hunting—it drops to all fours and moves with a nauseating, too-fast lope. In torchlight, it looks like a man forced into a beast's posture by invisible hands.

They haunt outskirts: burned farmsteads, mass graves, abandoned checkpoints. Some are used as loose "patrols" by Choir Plague-Deacons, collared with bone fetters and turned loose where resistance is strongest. Others slip their leashes and follow their own broken instincts: drawn back to their old homes, to spouses who now bolt the door at night, to children who recognize something in the Ravener's eyes and cry for a parent already dead.

The worst thing about them, Rals say, is the scraps of humanity that remain. A Ravener might pause at the sight of a family crest, might whine at the doorway of a house it once owned, might try to speak a name before the jaws take over again. Putting one down feels less like slaying a beast and more like finishing a botched execution Athrakar began.

Iron-Scour Scion

Threat 4, Defense 55%, DR 3, Wounds 5
Attacks: Iron-Horn Charge 60% (1d12; on Win by 20+ Edge may inflict an extra Wound), Gore & Trample 55% (1d10), Hail of Shards 50% (1d8, Near cone from shedding plates)
Traits:

- **Armored Aberration:** Skin has ossified into iron-dark plates; counts as heavy armor (DR 3); melee attacks vs the Scion at Reach suffer –10 unless using heavy or crushing weapons.
- **Pain is Memory:** Each Wound taken grants the Scion +10 to its next attack as agony feeds the curse.
- **Broken Lineage:** The Scion is usually a former knight or noble, twisted by a specific Choir rite that fuses armor and flesh; seeing its old heraldry (cloak, banner, signet) may force it into a one-round frenzy against whoever bears it.

The Iron-Scour Scion was once the sort of person whose statue would stand in a courtyard: a knight of renown, a household champion, a tournament darling. When Athrakar's taint took them, it did so with a cruel kind of irony—turning all the symbols of their station into instruments of their damnation.

In early stages, the curse manifests as patches of hardened skin beneath the armor, like bony callus. Then the flesh begins to eat the metal. Plate welds to muscle. Mail sinks into tendons. Greaves and gauntlets become extrusions instead of separate pieces. Eventually, the armor cannot be removed because there is no longer a difference between "knight" and "harness." Horn-like growths—made of the same iron-dark substance—sprout from shoulders, elbows, and brow, turning the Scion into a charging nightmare built to rupture lines and crush bodies.

The Choir is not blind to the battlefield value. Iron-Scour Scions are sometimes created deliberately from

captured knights or Rals who fell into Choir hands before the Order could reclaim their bodies. They are turned against their own banners, driven at the head of undead wedges to break shield walls that once opened for them in honor. The sight of a familiar crest welded into a monstrous frame can crack mortal morale faster than any sermon.

Up close, there are still traces of the person inside: a jawline beneath spurs of iron, a voice that sometimes growls a half-prayer before the charge, eyes that remember fear but cannot act upon it. A Ral who recognizes a former comrade in an Iron-Scour Scion must decide whether to try to arrest the charge—or to grant a final Quietus through the thick, screaming plates.

Star-Sworn Skinchanger

Threat 3, Defense 65%, DR 1 (shifting hide), Wounds 4
Attacks: Tendril-Limb Lash 65% (1d8; Reach), Splintering Bite 55% (1d10 vs grappled target), Sudden Warp 50% (Close teleport/contortion; reposition/self-only)
Traits:

- **Flux-Flesh:** Once per round, the Skinchanger may convert a successful Dodge (Defense) into a grotesque reshaping—squeezing through gaps, flowing around a blow; treat as +10 Defense for that attack.
- **Moon of the Grave Star:** The curse waxes and wanes with Athrakar's visibility; on clear nights under the Grave Star, all its attacks gain +10 and its DR increases to 2. In heavy cloud or underground, it suffers –10 on all offensive actions.
- **Remembered Face:** It can assume a near-perfect mimicry of its former human face and frame for short periods (an hour or so) at the cost of pain; Deception vs Awareness contests allow it to enter villages, call old friends, or beg sanctuary.

Star-Sworn Skinchangers are the most insidious of the Cursed because they do not immediately look like monsters. They were villagers, priests, scribes, even minor Choir functionaries who drew too close to Athrakar's rites and had their sense of self loosened from their bones.

The first sign is usually the dreams: sensations of one's own body melting and reforming, bones softening, skin becoming liquid. Then, under the Grave Star's peak or during a particularly potent hymn, the physical follows. Limbs elongate or shrink at will. Ribs can open like shutters. The skull can flow and reform, eyes sinking deeper or pulling wider, jaws unhinging and rehinging with a wet, grating sound.

In full monstrous aspect, a Skinchanger is an affront to structure. It moves like a spilled shadow trying to remember how to be three-dimensional—crawling on wall and ceiling alike, compressing through arrow slits, popping joints out of position to escape bonds. Its skin is slick and taut, shot through with luminous star-veins that pulse in time with Athrakar's grim radiance overhead.

But the curse is not constant. Many Star-Sworn Skinchangers have long stretches where they look almost human again. They hide in towns, praying that the next tide of transformation does not break in public. Some cling to their old lives, hiding locked in cellars during "bad nights." Others flee into the wild and become urban legends: the "thing" that sometimes knocks on doors in the shape of a lost child, the "traveler" whose shadow moves a half-second too late.

The Choir treats them as useful but unreliable assets—perfect infiltrators when properly managed, terrifying loose ends when not. The Order sees them as tragic abominations: living proof of how deeply the Grave Star can twist even those who never actively chose it. Killing one while it wears a familiar face has broken more than one Companion's composure.

Horrors — Where the Grave Star Touches the World

If the Cursed are what happens to one person, **Horrors** are what happens to *places*.

A Horror is not just a big monster; it is a catastrophe with a shape. Something in the world—cathedral, valley, falling star, orchard, drowned town—has been claimed so completely by Athrakar that it stands up and walks, or at least *moves*. Where a lesser undead can be turned and a Sinister can be argued with, Horrors answer prayers only in earthquakes, floods, and the sound of stone breaking. They are unique. There is one bell-tower corpse rising from a drowned nave, one orchard whose roots have learned to hate the sky, one star-fragment lying in a crater like a heart carved from black glass.

Facing a Horror is never "just a fight." It is a siege against a landmark that a generation of mortals will tell stories about. Rals ride into their lairs knowing that the ground, the weather, and the dead all belong to the enemy. Defeating a Horror often means changing the map: draining a valley, collapsing a cathedral, scarring a region permanently. Leaving one alive means accepting that Athrakar owns that piece of the world now, and every road that passes near it will eventually run in the Grave Star's direction.

Varlithar

Threat 5, Defense 45%, DR 6, Wounds 10
Attacks:

- **Tsunami Toll 65%** – The bell in Varlithar's chest swings and booms. All creatures in low ground within Near/Far range inside the drowned cathedral take **1d12+Edge**; on a Win by 20+ Edge they must test Athletics or be swept prone and dragged into deeper water.
- **Drowning Peal 60%** – A pressure-wave of sound and ghost-water. **1d10** and an Endurance Test or begin suffocating as lungs fill with invisible flood.
- **Flooded Grasp 55%** – Ropes of spectral weed, chain, and tethering line lash from the dark. **1d10** to a target and pull from Close to Reach (submerged) on a Win.
- **Falling Stone 55%** – Varlithar's movement shakes its half-sunken cathedral apart. Masonry and iron rain down, **1d10+2** to 1–3 chosen targets in Close/Near zones.

Traits:

- **Unique Monumental Horror:** Varlithar is *one* being: a drowned colossus of bell, tower, and bound dead. Destroying it is a campaign-level achievement.
- **Lair-Bound Colossus:** Cannot stray far from the ruined riverside cathedral of Varl; it shifts through flooded naves, crypts, and the surrounding river-pool.
- **Rising Waters:** Each round Varlithar acts, the water rises or surges. Track a **Drowning the Nave (6-tick)** Clock; at full, all ground spaces in the cathedral count as deep water with severe penalties for those without climb/boats.
- **Grave Resonance:** Lesser undead within the lair "hear" the bell; they gain +10 to Morale/Discipline and Awareness while Varlithar still tolls. The Horror may tick a **Grave Congregation** Clock instead of attacking as buried corpses stand up in the flood-silt.
- **Twisted Sanctity:** The cathedral once housed strong Sanctity; Athrakar's corruption coils through it. Faith workings here gain extra punch—but on a failed Faith Test, the Director may tick **Drowning the Nave** or **Grave Congregation** as backlash.

Lore & History

Before the Grave Star rose, the river-port of Varl was known for two things: honest bargemen and a bell whose voice could roll upriver for miles. That bell, cast in memory of a long-forgotten victory, hung in a stone tower above a broad-shouldered cathedral. On festival days, its tolling shook dust from rafters and made the river blush with reflected gold.

When plague came on the spring thaw, it came fast. Flooded streets turned into disease canals. The cathedral became a refuge, then a morgue. The dead stacked against its doors, then against its altar. In the end, there were no hands left to ring the bell for the last of the dying; the river took the town in slow, choking gulps, and the tower leaned, leaned, then settled at a drunken angle over a deep black pool.

The Choir arrived too late for conquest, but not too late for exploitation. Star-priests and Plague-Deacons descended into the drowned crypts with chains, relics, and hymnals. They wove Athrakar's name into the old litanies, packed bones into chambered vaults beneath the bell, bound drowned citizens where they lay. They wanted a listening-station, a node—a bell that would carry their gospel along the water.

What they made instead was Varlithar.

On a night of thunder and river-mist, the bell boomed without hands on the rope. Stone cracked and sloughed away from something shrugging inside the tower. All the mass of corpses, chains, rusted iron, and flooded sanctity tore itself upward and inward, folding around the bell as if the city were trying to grow itself a body.

Varlithar stands knee-deep in the drowned nave: a hunched colossus whose torso is the shattered bell-tower, whose ribs are arches, whose arms are cable-knotted buttresses that drag through water like claws. The bell swings in its chest cavity, each toll rippling the river itself. Its head is an impression rather than a skull: a suggestion of window and broken masonry that turns, slowly, to look at motion on the banks.

It is not mindless. It does not wander away because it does not *want* anything beyond its drowned parish. It remembers the town in a way no living survivor does: children's games in the courtyard, wedding processions, the sound of rain on stone. Those memories mix with the Choir's violent prayers in a stew of drowned consciousness. Sometimes, in the crash of its tolls, Rals swear they can hear pleas for help layered under Athrakar's name.

The Choir now treats Varlithar as both asset and nuisance. It can shatter fleets and drag armies into the river with a handful of tolls—but it also smashes Choir ships that feel "wrong" to it, drowns star-priests whose voices rub its half-memory raw. No one truly commands it. They only approach with offerings and retreat before the water rises.

For the Order, Varlithar is both a threat to river travel and a desecration of a place that was once purely holy. To silence it would mean sending Rals and Companions into a cathedral where the very air tries to fill your lungs with river and half-heard hymns, to fight a creature that *is* the architecture around you. You don't just kill Varlithar; you tear down a haunted town and hope the river forgives you.

Merrowen

Threat 5, Defense 55%, DR 5, Wounds 9
Attacks:

- **Root Lance 65%** – House-thick roots spear from below; **1d12** to targets in a chosen zone (Close/Near), can bypass cover by punching through floors and earth.
- **Crushing Bough 60%** – Massive limbs sweep; **1d10+2**, may knock multiple foes prone or scatter lines.

- **Sap-Blood Miasma 55%** – Cloud of sweet, rotting vapor; **1d8** area damage plus tests vs sickness/Corruption. Those who fail cough blood and suffer penalties to physical actions.
- **Fruit of Ruin 50%** – Hurls huge, swollen "fruit" that bursts on impact; **1d10** in a Near blast and seeds the ground with writhing roots that hinder movement and provide partial cover to undead.

Traits:

- **Unique Valley-Scale Horror:** Merrowen is the malignant orchard-heart of Redmere itself. There is only one; it is the valley.
- **Distributed Flesh:** Each Wound represents large swathes of grove destroyed or severed; cutting down isolated trees is meaningless until you strike clusters tied to the Heart.
- **Hidden Heart-Root:** The true core lies deep beneath the oldest grove, a pulsing knot of root and tainted soil. Only exposing or reaching this core allows a final blow; until then, Merrowen regrows.
- **Harvest of the Willing:** Redmere's enthralled villagers and Orchard Wardens fight for it. While at least a dozen cult-bound villagers live in the valley, Merrowen gains +10 Defense; their prayers and blood thicken its bark.
- **Season of Awakenings:** Merrowen stirs in stages. Track an **Orchard Waking (8-tick)** Clock; at low ticks the horror manifests as localized attacks, sap-mists, and subtle terrain shifts. At full, the whole valley rises and fights as one colossal body.

Lore & History

The people of Redmere used to joke that the gods loved them more than anyone else. Summers came mild, frosts light, rains regular. When other valleys spoke of blight, Redmere counted casks of cider. Each year the orchards crept a little further up the hillsides, and the villagers' gratitude drifted from heartfelt prayer to smug assumption.

Then the blight years came, and for the first time in living memory the trees faltered. Leaves spotted, fruit rotted on the branch, bark split. The Orchard Wardens watched the valley's identity shrivel before their eyes. They tried grafting, burning, new fertilizers, old prayers. Nothing took.

The Choir's offer came wrapped in humility: a single Plague-Deacon, soft-spoken, promising "soil-craft" that understood the balance of death and life. Rituals were performed beneath the largest trees at night: blood poured into the roots, star-sigils carved into trunks, whispered prayers not to the old saints who loved green things, but to a far light that had never once nourished a leaf.

The blight receded. The fruit returned. It returned too strongly.

Apples stayed perfect too long. Leaves did not fall quite right. Roots pushed stones aside instead of skirting them. Children born after the rites grew up never having seen a bad harvest, and never quite understanding why their elders looked uneasy when they thanked "the soil."

Merrowen is what happened when gratitude turned into worship and worship into possession.

The Horror's true body is a cancer at the valley's core: a colossal tangle of roots thick as towers, pulsing with sap that glows faintly under Athrakar's light. From that heart, every tree in Redmere takes nourishment. In quiet times, Merrowen sleeps in the rhythms of the seasons, dreaming in fruit and frost. But when enough blood soaks the soil, when enough prayers to the Grave Star drift between branches, the valley itself begins to move.

Roots crack open roads like eggshell. Trunks twist together into archways that close behind intruders. Farmhouses are lifted and gently folded into new trunks, their stones and beams becoming part of the Horror's limbs. The sky disappears behind a knitted canopy that shudders with each breath of wind as if breathing. Villagers with skin like ripe fruit and eyes ringed with green take up pruning hooks and axes, laughing as they die for the harvest they love more than themselves.

Merrowen has a kind of personality, but it is not human. It cares about fruit, growth, and a kind of obscene continuity: the idea that nothing should ever truly leave the valley, only be composted. It "loves" its people the way a stomach loves food. When a Ral rides into Redmere and threatens that cycle, Merrowen notices not as a mind noticing an enemy, but as a body noticing a parasite.

The Order's archives mention Merrowen only in scattered, contradictory reports: "trees moving," "valley that closed," "Rals lost in roots." Some argue that to kill it would be to starve entire provinces. Others argue that to *leave* it is to accept that Athrakar has already rewritten what agriculture means. Either way, if Merrowen ever fully awakens without warning, it will prove that no wall or sword can protect you from a god that grows under your feet.

Oremnath

Threat 5, Defense 50%, DR 7, Wounds 11
Attacks:

- **Starfall Hammer 65%** – Oremnath brings down a limb or massive, meteor-like growth; **1d12+2** to a chosen zone (Close/Near), with severe knockdown and structure damage.
- **Gravitic Pulse 60%** – A wave of warped force radiates from its core; **1d10** to all within Near range, plus tests vs being hurled back or pulled toward it (Director chooses by scene).
- **Shard Storm 55%** – Oremnath shakes free razor fragments of black, star-glass bone; **1d8** in a Near cone and potential Corruption tests as shards burrow into flesh.
- **Eye of Athrakar 50%** – A focused beam from one of its crater-eyes; **1d10+Edge** to a single target or small cluster, often bypassing mundane cover at Director's call.

Traits:

- **Unique Fallen Fragment:** Oremnath is a singular chunk of Athrakar's substance that survived entry, half-flesh and half-stone. There is no second one.
- **Crater-Bound Titan:** It lies in a deep impact basin—partly buried, partly upright. Oremnath can shift within this bowl, but not leave it entirely; the entire crater is its lair.
- **Field of Bending:** Within the crater, distance and line-of-sight warp subtly. Treat ranged attacks and movement as if under intermittent ±10 penalties/bonuses, and allow the Director to justify strange trajectories and falls.
- **Radiant Corruption:** Merely being in Oremnath's light forces periodic Corruption tests; certain failures may mutate terrain or lesser creatures nearby. Track an **Athrakar's Breath (8-tick)** Clock; at full, the surrounding region develops a permanent Grave Star taint (new undead, warped flora/fauna, or a minor node).
- **Slumbering Will:** Oremnath's awareness is slow but immense. It may ignore small groups entirely until harmed or confronted with strong Faith/Sorcery workings. When fully roused, it targets the greatest "disturbance"—brightest Faith, boldest Sorcery, loudest armies.

Lore & History

Most people think the Grave Star is just that: a star, distant and watching. The Choir knows better. Athrakar is an object and an intention. Fragments fall.

Once, in a dead stretch of borderland far from any proper road, the night brightened with a new, ugly dawn. Witnesses—few and unreliable—spoke of a streak of black-red fire crossing the sky and a sound like a cathedral collapsing in reverse. When the smoke cleared days later, there was a crater where three villages and a watch fort had stood.

The Choir's first reaction was anger. The impact ruined carefully-laid plans for plague and subversion. But when their scouts reached the crater, they fell silent. At its center lay something too ordered to be rock and too wrong to be flesh: a titanic mass of black, glassy bone studded with eyes, vents, and slow-glowing veins of star-fire. It steamed in the cold air, each exhalation warping light.

They named it Oremnath in their internal ledgers—a new "organ" of Athrakar exposed to the world.

Approaching Oremnath is like walking down the throat of a dead god. Gravity feels slightly off; steps land too light or too heavy. Voices echo in directions that don't match the walls. The sky above the crater looks subtly different, as if the stars were leaning in to watch. Lesser undead brought near it shudder and rearrange, becoming more efficient, more obedient—or simply melting down into useful, humming sludge.

At first, the Choir tried to build a temple around Oremnath. Foundations cracked. Walls bowed away from it. Priests who spent too long in the crater began speaking in tongues no one recognized, drawing diagrams that made sane eyes water. Over time, they learned to keep their distance: outer shrines, observation posts, converging armies that use Oremnath as a kind of living siege engine. Anything driven toward the crater either dies, rises different, or never climbs out again.

Oremnath itself rarely moves in ways mortals can immediately understand. Sometimes its surface rises in a vast, slow wave like a giant trying to roll over in its sleep. Sometimes an eye the size of a house opens and tracks a Ral across the rim with detached curiosity. Sometimes it shudders and a spray of black shards arcs into the air, where they hang for a heartbeat before falling like knives miles away.

Its "personality" is closer to a weather system than a mind. It is drawn to patterns of devotion and defiance. A lone peasant praying on the rim might be ignored; a Ral invoking Faith in full armor and daring it to answer will be noticed. Sorcery cracked from tomes near its body might be amplified or unraveled; either way, Oremnath's attention is lethal.

For the Order, Oremnath is a question without a clean answer. Destroying it may not even be possible; at best, they might shatter it into smaller, more manageable horrors, seeding the world with star-chunk wounds. Leaving it alone guarantees that the Choir will someday organize a ritual large enough to let Oremnath *do* something on purpose instead of by reflex.

Facing Oremnath should feel like trying to kill an idea that fell out of the sky. Steel and Faith can hurt it. Boons can twist its blasts away. But every blow against its black shell echoes back through the Grave Star's light, and no Ral walks out of that crater the same as they entered—if they walk out at all.

Sinisters — Faces Behind the Choir

Where Horrors loom and Cursed howl, the **Sinisters** speak.

They are man-sized, vaguely humanoid, and utterly wrong: mind-drinkers with tentacled faces and too many eyes; heresiarchs with thirteen independent tongues nested in their throats; chain-draped scribes whose skin is a ledger of every oath Athrakar has ever twisted. Each Sinister is unique—*a* Nyzhar, *a* Serathiel,

a Maldrux Var—and each stands at the center of a web of Choir influence: cults, star-priests, plague legions, captive nobles, and frightened towns who have already started to make small, poisonous compromises.

Sinisters are built to be **nemeses**, not random encounters. They plan campaigns, preach doctrine, sign contracts, and decide which villages burn and which are "saved" into chains. Mechanically, they sit in the same space as powerful villains and master schemers; in the fiction, they are the voices through which Athrakar explains itself to humanity. A Ral who chooses a Sinister as their quarry is not just hunting a monster—they are declaring war on a *strategy*: the Choir's espionage, its sermons, its contracts. Killing one may not stop the Grave Star, but it can decapitate a region's corruption and give the living one more season that does not end in a hymn.

Nyzhar the Veil-Drinker

Threat 4, Defense 70%, DR 2, Wounds 6
Attacks:

- **Mind Spear 70%** – Invisible psychic lance; **1d10** to a single target in Near range, ignores mundane armor; target must test **INT or Faith** or suffer Disadvantage –10 to all actions next round from psychic whiplash.
- **Memory Rake 65%** – Nyzhar tears at recollections; **1d8** and a **Corruption test**; on a Loss, the victim forgets a recent detail (route, name, password) at the Director's call.
- **Tendril Lash 60%** – Physical strike from facial/tentacle array; **1d8** at Reach, may Grapple on a Win (victim suffers –10 Defense until free).

Traits:

- **Unique Star-Mind:** There is only one Nyzhar. If it falls, that specific pattern of thought and hunger is gone.
- **Mind Feast:** When Nyzhar reduces a target to Down with Mind Spear or Memory Rake, it may "feed" instead of finishing them: the victim tests **INT or PRE**; on a Loss, Nyzhar permanently learns one secret, Skill, or personal Anchor. The target may suffer a permanent –5% to one mental Skill or a hole in memory.
- **Veil-Walker:** Nyzhar slips along the edges of perception. Once per scene, it may treat a solid shadowed surface as a doorway, stepping from one patch of deep shadow to another within Near range.
- **Puppet Strings:** Nyzhar may maintain **1–3 Thralls** (important NPCs) already dominated over time. In a scene, it can attempt instant domination: contested **Presence vs the victim's PRE or Faith**; on a Win, it forces one simple action ("drop your weapon," "open the gate," "lie now") before the effect shatters.
- **Star-Slick Aura:** Those within Reach feel their thoughts run thin. All **planning/Scholar/Lore** Tests near Nyzhar suffer –10 unless the Protagonist spends Destiny or invokes a strong Anchor (loved one, holy vow, etc.).

Lore & History

The Choir likes its priests loud and its generals obvious. Nyzhar is neither. It is the thing they send when secrets matter more than armies.

Stories disagree on what Nyzhar "really" looks like, which is fitting: anyone who has stared long enough to be certain rarely remembers clearly afterward. All accounts agree on a few points. It wears robes cut in the high style of some dead court, fine fabric stiff with dried salt and star-dust. Its limbs are long and jointed wrong, fingers too slender and too many, always resting lightly on the edges of things as if testing the boundaries of reality. Where its face should be, there is a crown of pulsing, pale eyes around a central mass of tentacles and inner jaws—a lamprey-like orifice surrounded by

coiling, flexible tendrils that taste thought as much as flesh.

Nyzhar appeared in the Choir's records decades ago, without origin. One year, inquisitions started landing exactly where resistance was organizing before the first whisper had even finished leaving a traitor's lips. Safehouses were compromised. Secret codes stopped working. Ringleaders vanished and later turned up leading processions in praise of Athrakar, voices hollow and movements puppet-smooth. Only when a surviving scribe described "a shadow that spoke inside my skull in my own voice" did someone realize they were facing more than a clever spy.

The Choir reveres Nyzhar as a "Veil-Master"—a living instrument of Athrakar's curiosity. It attends high rites in silence, tentacles folded politely, while star-priests chant. Afterwards, those same priests find themselves making choices they do not fully remember deciding. Its presence is not command in the vulgar sense; it is erosion, the gentle rearranging of minds until they slope toward the Grave Star's will.

To *the Order of Ral*, Nyzhar is poison hidden in thought. There are Rals whose entire chapters have been broken by a single failed interrogation: Companions turned into Thralls, safe routes compromised, caches emptied, Stronghold politics warped by whispered doubts that were never theirs. Nyzhar prefers to face a Ral only after peeling away their supports, then meeting them in a place where their anchors are weakest: an old battlefield, a ruined childhood home, a chapel where no saints answer.

It does not hate. It is curious. It drinks memories to understand how mortals break, and then arranges scenes to test new fractures. Killing Nyzhar is less like destroying a man and more like smashing a delicate, foul instrument that has been playing a slow, quiet music inside everyone's skull.

Serathiel of the Thirteen Tongues

Threat 4, Defense 65%, DR 3, Wounds 7
Attacks:

- **Bladed Sermon 65%** – Serathiel's hooked censer and tongue-tendrils lash in a flurry; **1d10** to a single target at Reach, or **1d8** to two adjacent targets. On a Win, may also inflict a minor Fear effect (PRE Test to stand firm).
- **Choir Canticle 60%** – Sonic and spiritual assault; **1d8** to all living targets within Close range, plus a **Faith or Presence** Test vs compulsion (drop to knees, weep, or lose an action in horrified awe).
- **Curse-Tongue Brand 55%** – Serathiel hisses a name and points; **1d8**, and on a Win the target takes –10 to one chosen Skill (Faith, Command, Persuasion, etc.) for the scene as the curse latches on.

Traits:

- **Unique Heresiarch:** Serathiel is *the* greatest living preacher of Athrakar—a single being whose sermons have turned entire towns.
- **Thirteen Tongues:** Within its cavernous mouth and throat grow layers of independent tongues, some forked, some thorned, some inscribed with runes. Once per scene, Serathiel may "change tongue" to shift mode:
    - **Tongue of Honey:** +10 to all **Persuasion/Deception**; spoken words count as **Advantage** on social Tests that spread Choir doctrine.
    - **Tongue of Iron:** +10 to all **Intimidation/Command**; Choir followers within Near range gain +10 to Morale/Discipline.
    - **Tongue of Ash:** Spoken blasphemies cause nearby holy symbols and shrines

to flicker; Faith workings suffer –10 until the scene ends unless bolstered by Destiny or relics.

- **Crowd-Drinker:** For each 5+ actively listening, unsaved cultists/followers present, Serathiel gains +1 temporary DR (max +3) as their devotion thickens the air around it. Breaking the crowd breaks the shield.
- **Voice in the Walls:** Even if Serathiel is physically absent, its sermons linger. Areas it has preached in can become spiritually "tainted"; the Director may allow Serathiel to project its voice once per scene into such a place, imposing Disadvantage on Resolve/Anchor Tests.
- **Promise of the Star:** Mortals who bargain with Serathiel gain tempting, immediate benefits (social, political, even minor magical), but each such pact raises local Corruption and binds them more tightly to Choir needs.

Lore & History

If the Grave Star had a mouth on earth, it would be Serathiel.

Physically, Serathiel is man-sized but monstrously wrong in detail. Its body wears the tattered remains of a bishop's finery over plates of chitinous "armor" that looks grown rather than forged. Multiple sets of eyes line its face, some human, some goat-pupiled, some nothing but black pits that drink lamplight. Its jaw unhinges farther than any human's, revealing throats upon throats, and within them the famed thirteen tongues—pulsing, muttering things that move even when Serathiel is silent.

No one remembers the original name. In Church records, there was once a bishop or cantor with a similar profile: charismatic, eloquent, favored by commoners and nobility alike. Those records end abruptly around the time the Choir first began to build proper temple-fortresses. The next time a familiar voice is heard in the chronicles, it belongs to someone preaching in the name of Athrakar, flensing doctrine down to hunger and inevitability.

Serathiel does not command armies by maneuver. It commands them by making them *want* to die correctly.

It travels from stronghold to stronghold with a small honor-guard of fanatics and a mobile reliquary filled with stolen holy objects—chalices, bones, banners. In each new place, it stages a progression of sermons: first gentle critique of the old saints ("Where were they when you starved?"), then praise of the Grave Star's honesty ("It promises nothing it will not deliver"), then finally the open invitation to "step into truth" by surrendering family, land, and life to the Choir's cause.

People listen because Serathiel never lies without wrapping the lie around a real wound. It remembers every famine, every failed crusade, every Noble who rode away promising aid and never returned. It quotes those failures like scripture and then offers a simple, monstrous alternative: "Serve what *is* winning."

For the Choir, Serathiel is irreplaceable. It turns defeats into martyr tales, turns massacres into proof that Athrakar's enemies are too weak to kill its faithful properly. It is also feared among high clergy, because those same tongues that draw crowds can flay reputations and strip ranks. A star-priest who disappoints Serathiel may find their own congregations turning on them overnight.

To the Order, Serathiel is a priority target on par with a regional warlord. A single visit from the heresiarch can hollow out years of quiet resistance in a region. Rals who ride against Serathiel quickly learn that killing it is only half the battle; they must also find a way to break the story it has spun around itself, or its death becomes just another "beautiful sacrifice" in Choir songs.

Facing Serathiel in person is dangerous not only because of its physical threat, but because every word it

speaks tries to rearrange your sense of why you fight. It argues, sincerely, that the sun has set on the old world and that the Order is merely prolonging its agony. If a Ral's Faith or Anchors are weak, they may find themselves agreeing in some quiet, exhausted corner of their soul—and that is a wound plate cannot cover.

Maldrux Var, the Chain-Scribe

Threat 4, Defense 60%, DR 4, Wounds 7
Attacks:

- **Chain Lash 65%** – Maldrux commands barbed, half-ethereal chains; **1d10** at Reach, can Grapple or disarm on a Win (Director's call).
- **Contract Brand 60%** – A burning sigil flares from his inscribed flesh; **1d8** to a single target and forces a **PRE or Faith** Test. On a Loss, the victim gains a temporary "mark" that Choir magick can track; Disadvantage to resist his social/command effects for the scene.
- **Soul Hook 55%** – Maldrux hurls a spectral hook; **1d10** vs a living or undead target. On a Win by 20+ Edge, the target must test **PRE**; on a Loss, Maldrux may either drag them one range band closer or suppress one of their Anchors for the scene ("you forget why this matters").

Traits:

- **Unique Pact-Architect:** Maldrux Var is the Choir's greatest binder of souls and oaths. There is one Chain-Scribe, and every serious pact bears his philosophical fingerprints.
- **Body of Scrolls:** His pallid skin is inscribed with thousands of micro-contracts and brands. When he "invokes" a clause, one segment burns away, giving him temporary **+10 to a related Test** (Command, Deception, Sorcery, etc.). When he runs out of a given clause, that trick is gone until he writes it anew in blood and ink.
- **Chain Dominion:** In his presence, any visible chains, manacles, or even symbolic bonds (vows, written contracts, debt-markers) can be animated briefly. Once per round he may cause one such "bond" to hinder, trip, or restrain at **+10** to his roll, treating it as an Assist to his own action.
- **Ledger of the Fallen:** Maldrux keeps a metaphysical ledger of those who have broken oaths to Athrakar—or to the Choir in Athrakar's name. Against such a target, he gains +10 to attack and social pressure Tests; they sense, instinctively, that he has *receipts*.
- **Quiet Accountant of Quietus:** Maldrux is fascinated by Rals in particular. He studies each death-knight's prior vows and Quietus. Once he has observed a Ral for a session or two of play, the Director may allow him targeted social strikes against that Ral's weakest Anchor ("You failed them once; why pretend you won't again?") with Advantage.

Lore & History

Where Serathiel wins hearts and Nyzhar steals minds, Maldrux Var binds the world in chains you cannot see until it is too late.

He looks, at first glance, like a gaunt, overworked scribe: hunched shoulders, ink-stained fingers, spectacles of ground black glass. A second look reveals that there is nowhere unmarked on him. His skin is parchment: lines of cramped script run across his cheeks, down his throat, along his arms and hands. Some are written in familiar tongues—legal formulas, tithing statements, confessionals. Others are in angular, eye-hurting characters no mortal system ever used.

Where a normal priest might wear a robe, Maldrux drapes himself in chains. Some are obvious: iron links, silvered fetters, hooks and weights. Others are conceptual—prayer cords braided with hair, rings taken

from the dead, debt tokens stamped with the faces of kings. They never tangle. They move with him like tame snakes, whispering softly against stone.

Maldrux began, so the rumors say, as a Church lawyer—one of those grey men who argue about what precisely a vow *means* when it meets the real world. At some point, he stared too long at the gap between promise and practice and heard something in the silence: Athrakar's cold amusement at mortals pretending their words meant anything compared to entropy.

He switched employers.

Since then, Maldrux has become the Choir's invisible conqueror. Armies fight, cities burn, saints fall—but what matters most, in the long run, are the papers he makes people sign and the oaths he convinces them to swear. Lords in failing keeps, mercenary bands on the brink of starvation, hedge-priests who cannot reconcile doctrine with reality: all have found Maldrux waiting at the bottom of their despair with contracts that *almost* sound fair.

He takes things in trade that seem small until the bill comes due: "a single decision on the field," "the refusal to answer that one prayer," "your silence when the Ral needs you most." He does not need them to break faith with Athrakar; he needs them to break faith with each other. Every betrayal is another line he can write into his skin, another clause to invoke.

For the Choir hierarchy, Maldrux is both tool and threat. He keeps precise, unforgiving ledgers. Star-priests who squander troops, inquisitors who botch purges, even other Sinisters with overreaching projects may find themselves summoned to "review deviations from projected obedience curves." There are whispers that even Serathiel listens when Maldrux clears his throat.

For the Order, Maldrux Var is the enemy they meet when they think they've won. After the fort has fallen, after the Horror has been driven back, contracts emerge: a garrison bought long ago, a supply line owned by Choir proxies, a vassal sworn to betray in one precise moment. He is the architect of Pyrrhic victories. Rals learn to fear the sight of a tidy man with ink-black spectacles more than a screaming demon.

He is fascinated by Rals because they are walking contradictions: oaths that did not die when their bodies did. Maldrux collects their stories like coins. When he finally stands across a table from a death-knight Protagonist, the scene should feel like a duel fought with paper and memory instead of swords—chains tightening with every sentence. Killing him will not erase the contracts he has already set loose in the world, but it will stop new ones from being written, and that alone is worth an entire campaign's blood.

Chapter 7: Random Encounter Tables

General Wilderness (Moors, Woods, Broken Fields)

Roll 1d20 when traveling off-road between settled regions.

d20	Wilderness Encounter
1	**Empty Wind & Watching Crows** – No direct foe, but a **Carrion Crow Murder** shadows the party for miles, crying loudly whenever the Ral looks toward the horizon. The Director may use them to foreshadow Choir, ghouls, or a recent battle.
2	**Grey Wolf Patrol** – A small pack of **Grey Wolf Pack-Hunters** trails the Ral at a distance, testing for weakness. They may lead to a carcass, a battle site, or a wounded traveler instead of attacking.
3	**Tainted Grave Wolves** – A pair of **Tainted Grave Wolves** drinking from a trickling stream that smells faintly of rot. The land here is softly Choir-touched; tracks point back toward a half-forgotten shrine.
4	**Blighted Boar Rampage** – A **Blighted Boar** bursts from the brush, wounded and panicked. It crashes through whatever is in its way – the Ral, a small camp, or a hidden Choir cache.
5	**Star-Marked Stag** – A lone **Star-Marked Stag** stands in a clearing, antlers faintly gleaming beneath clouded light. Killing it, sparing it, or just watching it has consequences: local rumors frame the Ral accordingly.
6	**Chapel Owl & Ruined Shrine** – A **Chapel Owl** circles an overgrown roadside shrine. Investigating reveals old blood stains, a broken Church symbol, and signs that **Choir Acolytes** used it recently. No enemies right now—just clues.
7	**Mire Leeches in the Low Ground** – Crossing a marshy hollow, the party risks stepping into a **Mire Leech Cluster**. Careful spotting avoids it; a rushed march means surprise attachment and slow draining harm.
8	**Crypt Spiders on Fallen Masonry** – A crumbled stone outbuilding hides a cluster of **Crypt Spiders**. Disturbing the stones (for shelter or loot) sends them spilling out over armor and packs.
9	**Shambling Corpses from a Ditch** – A forgotten roadside burial trench has given rise to several **Shambling Corpses**, half-buried, dragging themselves toward warmth and sound. Signs of hasty plague disposal abound.
10	**Graveyard Skeleton Strays** – A pair of **Graveyard Skeletons** wandering far from their original yard; maybe the Choir lost control, or the grave-scripts are decaying. Their path points toward an older, more dangerous site.
11	**Hungry Ghouls on the Edge of a Field** – **Hungry Ghouls** picking over a shallow grave of soldiers or bandits. They bolt if overwhelmed, possibly leading the Ral to a larger grave, a camp, or a Choir experiment.
12	**Pilgrim Thread** – A small stretch of **Pilgrim Mob** walking with tattered banners toward some distant shrine. Among them: someone with Choir sigils burned into their skin, or a plague-ridden child, or a relic with dubious origin.
13	**Desperate Brigands** – A handful of **Desperate Brigands** trying to hold up whoever comes along. They're hungry, poorly led, and terrified when they realize the "knight" is not entirely alive.
14	**Outlaw Captain's Scouts** – 2–3 scouts serving an **Outlaw Captain** watch from the tree line. If followed, they lead to a hidden bandit camp that may be Choir-influenced or simply dangerous.
15	**Carrion Crow Storm** – A **Carrion Crow Murder** explodes from a nearby copse, disturbed by something worse: roll again on this table, with the next encounter already in mid-scene when the Ral arrives.
16	**Trained War Dog Lost** – A **Trained War Dog** snarls over the corpse of a mercenary; its harness marks a lord, witch-hunter, or Chapterhouse ally. The dog can be calmed and claimed—or reveals a trail of something grim.
17	**Mass Grave Smell** – No immediate foe; the wind carries the distinct reek of a **Mass Grave Swarm** site somewhere nearby. Tracks, crows, and dragging marks hint at where.
18	**Blighted Watering Hole** – A stream or pond is tainted. Dead fish and a **Plague Rat Swarm** claim the edges. Drinking here without caution invites disease; careful work might trace contamination toward a **Plague-Deacon** or Choir node.
19	**Star-Weird Night** – That night, the Grave Star burns too bright. Any wilderness encounter above

d20	Wilderness Encounter
	may be “upgraded”: beasts show mild corruption, undead are more alert, and Corruption checks might accompany certain choices.
20	**Athrakar’s Distant Glimmer** – An omen, not a full manifestation: fleeting visions, cold surges, and strange hush. Treat as a minor brush with an **Athrakar’s Eye-Fragment** influence zone; no full statted Eye appears, but Sorcery and Choir signs are stronger here.

Traveled Roads & Waystations

Roll 1d20 when using main roads, trade routes, or shrine-paths.

d20	Road Encounter
1	**Empty Road, Fresh Ruts** – No foe, just clear evidence of heavy wagons recently passing: perhaps carrying plague corpses, relics, or Choir supplies. Following the tracks may lead to a bigger scene.
2	**Village Militia Checkpoint** – **Village Militia Spearmen** nervously block the road with a makeshift barrier. They've heard rumors of "Choir knights" and may mistake the Ral for one. Roleplay-heavy; violence is optional.
3	**Town Watch Patrol** – A band of **Town Watchmen** escorting a petty official, drunk and brusque. They may demand tolls, warn of Choir, or be scouting for conscripts.
4	**Desperate Brigands at the Bend** – **Desperate Brigands** have chosen this exact corner. If the Ral looks too dangerous, they might instead beg for food or protection from something worse behind them.
5	**Highway Cutthroats** – A small gang of **Highway Cutthroats** with crossbows ready behind cover. They aim for quick kills and faster looting—until they realize their target does not die correctly.
6	**Mercenary Men-at-Arms on the March** – A company of **Mercenary Men-at-Arms** heading to or from a contract. Could be allies against Choir, or hired muscle for some corrupt lord working with them.
7	**Hedge Knight Seeking Trial** – A **Hedge Knight** challenges the Ral in the name of honor, heresy-hunt, or boredom. This can be a duel, a tense standoff, or the beginning of a complicated rivalry.
8	**Broken Knight-Errant on Foot** – A **Broken Knight-Errant** trudges along road or ditch, armor begrimed, eyes hollow. He may beg the Ral to end him, demand a place in the Order, or try to "free" villagers from an undead protector.
9	**Pilgrim Mob with Relic** – A **Pilgrim Mob** crowd the road, carrying a reliquary that might be genuine or Choir-tainted. Crowd dynamics, panic, and faith all play here.
10	**Grave-Robbers with a Cart** – A pair of **Grave-Robbers** hauling a small handcart at dusk. Under the tarp: bones, half-looted bodies, or something that is still moving.
11	**Witch-Hunter on Business** – A **Witch-Hunter** and small retinue ride hard toward rumor of Sorcery or Choir activity. They may see the Ral as ally, rival, or abomination to be tested.
12	**Fanatic Penitents** – A clutch of **Fanatic Penitents** flagellate and chant down the road. They may lash out at perceived sinners, beg the Ral for absolution, or declare the Chapterhouse a heresy.
13	**Crossbow Levy at a Toll Gate** – A small gate defended by **Crossbow Levies** enforcing tolls or a quarantine. They're nervous, under orders, and badly briefed about both Choir and Rals.
14	**Outlaw Captain's Roadblock** – A heavily staged ambush under an **Outlaw Captain**: trees felled, carts overturned, archers hidden. It may be a robbery—or a deliberate attempt to capture the Ral for Choir delivery.
15	**War Dogs on the Loose** – A pair of **Trained War Dogs**, handlers dead nearby. They are stressed, hungry, and dangerous; calming them may earn future service or clues to a failed defense.
16	**Choir Acolytes in Disguise** – "Pilgrims" or "monks" on the road are actually **Choir Acolytes** carrying bone-script, sigils, or small reliquaries. They will avoid a fight if possible; if cornered, they call on Grave Star hymns.
17	**Plague Procession** – A grim convoy escorted by **Plague-Deacons** or local priests; carts of shrouded bodies roll toward a mass grave. The Ral's mere presence unsettles everyone. The Choir might be using this as cover.
18	**Abandoned Waystation** – No people, just an inn and stable stripped bare. Signs of struggle, **Plague Rat Swarm** in the cellar, and maybe a **Bound Shade** lurking in the common room hearth.
19	**War Rumor Train** – Messengers, stragglers, and wounded soldiers cross paths with the Ral. No single statted foe, but they carry news of **Choir Knights**, **Bone Colossi**, or node activity ahead.
20	**Choir Knight Patrol** – A small patrol led by a **Choir Knight** with a few **Choir Acolytes**. This is a serious encounter; they may be looking for the Chapterhouse, hunting a specific Ral, or escorting something precious.

Rural Village & Farmland

Roll 1d20 when the Ral lingers around farms, hamlets, or small villages.

d20	Village Encounter
1	**Tense Quiet** – No overt foe. Fields are half-tended; people close shutters when the Ral rides by. Rumors of Choir or undead linger, but no one speaks openly unless trust is built.
2	**Village Militia Drill – Village Militia Spearmen** practicing clumsy formations. The Ral might instruct them, mock them, or simply watch as they try and fail to imagine real undead.
3	**Town Watchmen on Loan** – A handful of **Town Watchmen** from a nearby town try to keep order after recent trouble. They're exhausted and suspicious of everyone, especially heavily armored corpses.
4	**Pilgrim Mob in the Square** – A **Pilgrim Mob** has camped at the village shrine, demanding miracles or judgment from a local priest. The Ral's arrival may escalate or defuse things.
5	**Grave-Robber at Work** – A **Grave-Robber** jumps the cemetery wall when they see the Ral. Capture or conversation reveals recent burials with odd symbols, star-touched bones, or choir scripts.
6	**Fanatic Penitents Harassing Locals – Fanatic Penitents** berate villagers for "insufficient sorrow," possibly dragging someone toward the graveyard for a "pious" execution.
7	**Plague Rat Swarm in Barn** – A **Plague Rat Swarm** overruns a grain barn or cellar. Villagers beg for help while terrified that any intervention might bring a Choir quarantine.
8	**Carrion Crow Murder on Roofs** – A **Carrion Crow Murder** gathers on roofs and fences, staring toward a particular cottage, well, or shrine—something is wrong there (shade, cultist, hidden relic).
9	**Shambling Corpse from Field** – A lone **Shambling Corpse** trudges through the cabbages, still in farmer's clothing. No one knows how it rose; the priest is frightened.
10	**Hungry Ghouls in the Orchard** – Signs of dug-up earth under fruit trees lead to **Hungry Ghouls** feeding on hastily buried plague victims. The village wants both the ghouls and the truth contained.
11	**Graveyard Skeleton Unbound** – A **Graveyard Skeleton** wanders near the chapel, confused. It may be the first test of a nearby **Bone-Script Scribe**, or a sign the graveyard wards are failing.
12	**Chapel Owl & Whispering Shade** – A **Chapel Owl** flies from the steeple as a **Bound Shade** manifests near the altar, tied to a recent injustice: theft, murder, or hidden Choir sympathies.
13	**Plague-Deacon's Visit** – A **Plague-Deacon** "inspects" the village, urging sick and poor to accept Athrakar's embrace. Locals are torn between fear of plague and fear of heresy.
14	**Choir Acolytes at the Well – Choir Acolytes** pretend to be stewards of a new "clean water" rite. In truth, they're seeding a mild star-taint in the well. Catching them early prevents later horrors.
15	**Witch-Hunter's Tribunal** – A **Witch-Hunter** has declared someone a cultist or Sorcerer. The accused may be guilty—or simply inconvenient. The Ral's presence forces a verdict sooner than anyone wanted.
16	**Outlaw Captain's Tax** – Men loyal to an **Outlaw Captain** arrive to collect "protection" from the village. They don't expect a Ral to walk out of a barn doorway.
17	**Tainted Grave Wolves in the Pasture – Tainted Grave Wolves** circle livestock at night. The villagers beg the Ral to intervene; the wolves may lead back to a Choir dump-site in the woods.
18	**Blighted Boar in the Turnips** – A **Blighted Boar** has taken over part of the fields. The villagers can't kill it, and now they fear it's "marked" by the Grave Star.
19	**Planned Choir Ritual** – Evidence of upcoming rites: chalk circles, stolen bones, a hidden bell. Actual **Choir Acolytes**, **Bone-Script Scribes**, or a **Cantor** arrive at dusk if the Ral waits.
20	**Hidden Node in the Chapel** – The village chapel itself hides a nascent node. A **Grave Lantern Ghost**, **Bound Shade**, or even a minor **Grave Shadow** is bound to the altar, and the local priest is part of it—or its victim.

Town & City Districts

Roll 1d20 in dense settlements, from market-towns to half-fallen cities.

d20	Urban Encounter
1	**Crowded Market, Watching Eyes** – No overt foe, but a network of petty criminals and informants note every move. Later **Highway Cutthroats** or **Outlaw Captains** may act on this information.
2	**Town Watch Sweep – Town Watchmen** conducting searches "for Choir agents." They may actually be looking for Rals, witch-hunters, or just bribes.
3	**Crossbow Levy on Rooftops – Crossbow Levies** patrol from above. Any disturbance may bring a volley; they are nervous and poorly informed.
4	**Street Thieves & Cutthroats** – A small band of **Highway Cutthroats** moonlighting as city thieves tries a quick ambush in alleys. They have boltholes, and might know about Choir movements if spared.
5	**Pilgrim Mob at a Gate** – A **Pilgrim Mob** presses at the city gate demanding sanctuary. Tension can erupt into riot, with guards, Ral, and possible Choir agitators all in the mix.
6	**Grave-Robbers Selling Goods – Grave-Robbers** hawk jewelry or bone charms in a back alley. Their wares may be traced straight to star-tainted cemeteries or Choir-controlled ossuaries.
7	**Fanatic Penitents Parade – Fanatic Penitents** drag a self-chosen victim through the streets seeking "purification." The crowd divides; the Ral's stance will be remembered.
8	**Plague Rat Swarm in Sewers** – A **Plague Rat Swarm** overflows from sewer grates, forcing people into higher streets. Following them back reveals clogged corpse-channels and possibly **Plague-Deacon** influence.
9	**Carrion Crows on Belfries** – A **Carrion Crow Murder** circles a particular bell tower or dome, indicating **Bell-Tower Horror**, **Grave Lantern Ghost**, or Choir presence above.
10	**Witch-Hunter's Stride** – A **Witch-Hunter** strides through town with retainers. They may be in open conflict with a local abbot, the Choir, or both. Their presence complicates any Ral mission.
11	**Mercenary Men-at-Arms Await Pay – Mercenary Men-at-Arms** idle in taverns, tense and unpaid. Rumors suggest either the Choir or a frightened lord is about to hire them.
12	**Outlaw Captain's Spies** – The city is a recruiting ground for an **Outlaw Captain**. Spies size the Ral up and may attempt a quiet parley about mutual enemies—or threats.
13	**Choir Acolytes as Street Preachers – Choir Acolytes** deliver subtle doctrine in shabby robes, blending athrakar's words with old saint speech. Disrupting them in public has political consequences.
14	**Bone-Script Scribe's Shop** – A "scribe" shop is actually run by a **Bone-Script Scribe**. They offer charms, protective glyphs, and warding circles that all secretly align with the Grave Star.
15	**Pallid Inquisitor's House of Questions** – A **Pallid Inquisitor** holds court in a commandeered townhouse, summoning nobles and priests alike. Entering on any terms risks being pulled into a web of accusations.
16	**Grave Lantern Ghost in Alley Shrine** – A neglected alley-shrine houses a **Grave Lantern Ghost** that lures drunks or desperate petitioners toward wrong doors and wrong bargains.
17	**Plague Wight in Quarantine Block** – A sealed district holds a **Plague Wight** and terrified survivors. The city wants the problem contained; the Choir wants it to spread.
18	**Bound Shade of a Hanged Man** – A **Bound Shade** lingers at a crossroads gibbet, whispering names of Choir collaborators, corrupt guards, or innocent scapegoats.
19	**Choir Knight Procession (Hidden)** – A small **Choir Knight** group uses backstreets, rooftop cover, or sewers to move a relic or prisoner. Spotting them requires sharp Awareness; confronting them is a major urban clash.
20	**Ossuary Golem Beneath the City** – Cracks in streets, odd tremors, and missing bodies hint that an **Ossuary Golem** is being assembled under the city in a forgotten ossuary. The encounter may be more investigation than immediate battle.

Graveyards, Barrows & Old Battlefields

Roll 1d20 whenever the Ral searches or travels through major burial grounds.

d20	Graves & Barrows Encounter
1	**Quiet Stones, Loud Memories** – No active threat. Names on stones connect to past campaigns, saints, or Rals who fell here. Lore hooks, not combat.
2	**Grave-Robber in Progress** – A **Grave-Robber** is mid-dig. The grave holds either star-marked remains, a restless shade, or something the Choir wants back.
3	**Shambling Corpses in Rows** – A cluster of **Shambling Corpses** shuffles between rows of graves, as if trying to remember where to lie down.
4	**Graveyard Skeleton Guard – Graveyard Skeletons** stand unnaturally in formation. Someone, or something, has drilled them like soldiers.
5	**Hungry Ghouls in Trenches – Hungry Ghouls** crawl through mass grave trenches under the soil. Disturbed ground erupts in claws and teeth when the Ral passes.
6	**Bound Shade at a Particular Stone** – A **Bound Shade** clings to one grave, obsessed with a lost oath, betrayal, or Choir-related injustice. Could be persuaded, freed, or weaponized.
7	**Grave Shadow Across the Row** – A **Grave Shadow** wraps along tombstones, whispering with voices of many dead. Its interest in the Ral is personal—drawn to their undeath.
8	**Barrow Wraith Crown** – A **Barrow Wraith** manifests atop an old mound, crowned with bones or rusted iron. It remembers wars before the Choir and may hate them—or all living things—equally.
9	**Crypt Spiders in Ossuary** – An ossuary door swings open to reveal **Crypt Spiders** spilling from tidy stacks of skulls. Some skulls bear Choir bone-script.
10	**Mass Grave Swarm Awakened** – Disturbing the wrong trench calls up a **Mass Grave Swarm**, grasping hands dragging the living down into stink and mud.
11	**Grave Lantern Ghost of a Watchman** – A **Grave Lantern Ghost** flits between stones, relighting itself at different graves. It might guide the Ral to specific names... or into danger.
12	**Mourning Pilgrim Mob** – A small **Pilgrim Mob** comes to weep and sing. Hidden among them: a **Choir Acolyte** or **Bone-Script Scribe** burying something quietly.
13	**Choir Acolytes Performing Rite – Choir Acolytes** and maybe a **Cantor** conduct a quiet rite over a freshly filled grave. The result could be new undead, a node, or a Choir-bound relic.
14	**Plague-Deacon's Pit** – A **Plague-Deacon** oversees dumping bodies into a new pit. He may welcome the Ral as "fellow servant of death" or denounce them as impure.
15	**Grave Star Revenant Rising** – The Ral arrives just as a **Grave Star Revenant** claws free of earth or stone, called by a recent atrocity or a carefully timed ritual.
16	**Ossuary Golem Assembly** – Choir workers or bone-scribes piece together an **Ossuary Golem** inside a charnel house. Catching them now may save a city later.
17	**Corpse-Flood in a Sunken Trench** – Rain or broken cisterns filled an old trench, and now a **Corpse-Flood** stirs if disturbed or if Choir hymns echo.
18	**Bell-Tower Horror Overlooking Grounds** – A nearby tower houses a **Bell-Tower Horror** whose tolling can stir graves and call the dead to stand. Its bells watch the cemetery like eyes.
19	**Athrakar's Eye-Fragment Glimpse** – A faint **Athrakar's Eye-Fragment** influence hovers: stars wrong overhead, sound muffled, cold breath from open graves. Minor manifestations only, unless escalated deliberately.
20	**Choir Knight & Retinue Vigil** – A **Choir Knight**, **Grave-Chain Warden**, and some undead hold vigil over a particular barrow. They expect either resistance or a Ral; this is a hard, boss-tier encounter.

Choir Node / Temple-Fortress Region

Roll 1d20 in the deep shadow of the Choir: near temple-fortresses, major nodes, and fully claimed towns.

d20	Choir-Dominated Encounter
1	**Oppressive Silence** – No visible foes, but hymns echo just at the edge of hearing. Corruption checks may apply; Faith workings feel strained.
2	**Choir Acolyte Patrol – Choir Acolytes** sweep alleys and shrines in small groups, chalking signs and reporting to unseen superiors. Easily crushed, but noisy to confront.
3	**Grave Star Cantor Rehearsal** – A **Grave Star Cantor** tests hymns in an echoing hall, adjusting pitch to affect undead below. Interrupting them may weaken site defenses.
4	**Bone-Script Scribe at Work** – A **Bone-Script Scribe** etches sigils into walls, bells, or foundations. Removing or corrupting their work can reshape node behavior.
5	**Plague-Deacon's Ward – Plague-Deacons** manage controlled contagion cages. Some are Choir experiments; some are "loyal citizens" infected as insurance.
6	**Choir Bell-Ringer on High** – A **Choir Bell-Ringer** stands poised with mallets, ready to trigger alarms or harm when certain Clocks tick. Taking them out early is a tactical coup.
7	**Grave-Chain Warden Guard Post** – A **Grave-Chain Warden** and minor undead guard a choke-point: gate, stair, or tunnel. Their chains are set up to drag intruders into kill zones.
8	**Choir Knight Patrol – Choir Knights** test defenses with "training fights" against undead, or conduct public executions. They're confident and supported by local infrastructure.
9	**Pallid Inquisitor's Tribunal** – A **Pallid Inquisitor** interrogates suspects in a courtyard or chapel hall. The line between guilty and innocent is thin, and the Ral's arrival might become part of the trial.
10	**Grave Star Precentor Overseeing Node** – A **Grave Star Precentor** personally inspects wards, undead placement, and hymn schedules. This is a rare chance to strike at a key planner.
11	**Graveyard Skeleton Cohort** – Drilled **Graveyard Skeletons** march in formation, a small-scale undead garrison. Their discipline is eerie; they respond to Cantor song instantly.
12	**Shambling Corpses in Storage** – Rows of inert **Shambling Corpses** lie in crypts, ready to be awakened by song or bells. Destroying them now is noisy but effective.
13	**Hollow-Helm Guardians – Hollow-Helms (Animated Armor)** stand sentinel in major halls. They activate only when specific sigils, sounds, or passages are triggered.
14	**Plague Wight in Cathedral Transept** – A **Plague Wight** patrols near a reliquary or altar, used as both guardian and symbol of Athrakar's mercy-through-disease.
15	**Grave Shade Infested Cloister – Grave Shadows** cling to columns and arches, enforcing unnatural quiet. Stealth and Faith are both challenged here.
16	**Ossuary Golem in Service** – An **Ossuary Golem** trundles along crypt corridors or temple courtyards, moving ossuaries, "organizing" the dead, or flattening resistance.
17	**Bone Colossus at Rest** – A **Choir Bone Colossus** stands half-dormant near the fortress or in a central plaza. Interfering with its bindings can disable or prematurely awaken it.
18	**Corpse-Flood Reservoir** – Below the node lies a cistern filled with a latent **Corpse-Flood**, ready to be unleashed via broken gates or deliberate Choir sabotage.
19	**Athrakar's Eye-Fragment Proper** – A full **Athrakar's Eye-Fragment** floats in some central ritual space, warping reality. Approaching may be a major arc climax, not a chance encounter.
20	**Full Choir Procession – Choir Knights**, **Cantors**, **Acolytes**, **Grave-Chain Wardens**, and undead march in full rite. The Ral stumbling into this is either a disaster... or legend waiting to happen.

Chapter 8: Adventure Seeds

Part One

Ashes on the Pilgrim Road
A string of roadside shrines has been smashed and their relics stolen. The trail leads along an old pilgrim route now haunted by star-touched carrion and "converted" pilgrims marching toward a Choir node.

- **Adversaries:** Grave-Star Cantor, converted flagellant pilgrims, bone-crows, ghoul pack.
- **Notable NPCs:** Maera of the Waystone (disgraced shrine-keeper), Old Neris (blind roadside prophet who "hears" the Grave Star humming under the stones).

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2. **The Bell That Won't Go Silent**
   In a hilltop village, the church bell tolls on its own every night at the same hour. Each toll drags another corpse half out of the grave. The villagers have chained the bell and gagged the clapper, but it rings anyway.
   - **Adversaries:** Bell-Wight (undead ringer fused to the belfry), skeletal parishioners, Choir "auditors" arriving to "help."
   - **Notable NPCs:** Father Joric (exhausted priest losing his faith), Hesta Ringmaker (bell-founder's granddaughter who knows a secret flaw in the metal).

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3. **The Quiet Plague Cart**
   A plague cart rolls the roads without driver or horses, pulled by shambling dead. Wherever it stops, the living grow sick while the dead grow restless. The Chapterhouse suspects Choir field-testing.
   - **Adversaries:** Plague-Wights, star-scarred alchemical constructs, Choir Plague-Deacon.
   - **Notable NPCs:** Doctor Avelin (Chapterhouse-aligned chirurgeon), Sair the Carter (sole survivor of the original cart crew, now half-mad).

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4. **Grain for the Dead**
   A rural baron keeps harvests high by secretly tithing grain to a buried Choir altar. The stored grain never rots—but the people who eat it begin to dream in Athrakar's light and wander at night.
   - **Adversaries:** Baron's household guard, dream-walkers, burrowing grave-worms, Choir Overseer.
   - **Notable NPCs:** Lady Ren (baron's guilt-stricken wife), Talen the Miller (knows which sacks bear the Star's mark).

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5. **The Fallen Ral's Mount**
   A riderless grave-warhorse returns to the Chapterhouse, barding torn, its Bond severed. Traces of the fallen Ral's last memories cling to the beast—memories that point toward a remote valley and a Choir experiment that must be stopped or avenged.
   - **Adversaries:** Ghoul Knights wearing stolen Ral armor, Choir anatomists, bone-golems built from dismembered cavalry.
   - **Notable NPCs:** Ral Archivist Helian (keeper of the dead Ral's records), Fen Kett (stablehand who can calm the traumatized mount).

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6. **The Star in the Well**
   Villagers in a drought-stricken hamlet dug their well deeper—and unearthed a tiny stone that

glows like Athrakar. Their water now heals wounds rapidly but leaves faint grave-sigils in the skin. Both the Choir and a rival Chapterhouse want the stone.

- **Adversaries:** Choir acquisition squad, rival Ral with different orders, tainted water-drowned undead.
- **Notable NPCs:** Willa the Well-warden (protective matriarch), Brother Olvic (naïve monk convinced the stone is a miracle).

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7. **Black Wedding at Dusk**
   A minor noble has agreed to marry his daughter to a Choir Legate in exchange for "eternal protection" of his lands. The wedding night will seal a regional pact in blood and undeath unless disrupted.
   - **Adversaries:** Choir Legate and retinue, star-sworn household guards, wraith-like bridesmaids.
   - **Notable NPCs:** Lady Irena (the unwilling bride, secretly promised elsewhere), Sir Harran (aging knight torn between oath to lord and horror at the pact).

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8. **The Relic-Smith's Debt**
   The Chapterhouse's chief relic-smith once forged experimental grave-iron chains for the Choir before defecting. A former Choir associate now blackmails him: return to complete the work, or watch the Chapterhouse's sanctity unravel through planted sabotage.
   - **Adversaries:** Choir black-ops cell, corrupted relic prototypes, assassins disguised as pilgrims.
   - **Notable NPCs:** Helvar Blackhand (relic-smith carrying crushing guilt), Lira of the Pale Mask (Choir agent who "never raises her voice").

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9. **The Choir Under the Stage**
   A traveling theatre troupe has become a moving Choir front. Their plays mock the Church, glorify the Grave Star, and hide hypnotic cadences that seed Corruption in the audience. Worse: they're genuinely entertaining.
   - **Adversaries:** Actor-cultists, hidden Cantor, charmed townsfolk, star-marked stagehands.
   - **Notable NPCs:** Master Edran (troupe leader and secret Cantor), Thomel (young actor having second thoughts), village bailiff who refuses to cancel the show.

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10. **The Saint Who Would Not Stay Dead**
    A revered saint's bones were once the pride of a cathedral. Now the saint has risen as a confused, radiant horror—half blessed, half star-touched—slaughtering Choir and commoner alike. Everyone insists they own the saint's legacy.
    - **Adversaries:** Unbound Saint (unique undead), Choir exorcists, panicked "faithful" mob.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Canon Myriel (pragmatic church official), Ral-ally from another Chapterhouse with a conflicting plan for the saint.

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11. **The Choir in the Orchard**
    A once-prosperous orchard village still bears heavy fruit, despite blight everywhere else. The trees are watered with blood, and their roots wrap around buried Choir sigils. The apples keep people hale but slowly erase their fear of death.
    - **Adversaries:** Orchard Wardens, star-touched wolves, buried husk-ghouls among roots.

- **Notable NPCs:** Old Mara (orchard matron who "just wanted one more harvest"), Orlin (boy who refuses to leave the trees).

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12. **The Night of Three Bells**
    Prophecy: on a night when three distant bells ring at once, a Choir ritual will open a corridor of Grave Star light across the sky. That night is coming. Each bell-tower is controlled by a different faction who will not cooperate.
    - **Adversaries:** Choir infiltrators, paranoid church militias, opportunistic bandits.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Sister Vey (prophet-nun who heard the warning), Bellkeeper Dor (who has locked himself in his tower and refuses all entry).

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13. **Bones in the Chapterhouse Walls**
    Signs of quiet haunting begin in your own stronghold: tools moved, cold spots, whispers in the hall of names. Investigation reveals that a former Chapterhouse master hid Choir-worked bones within the walls to "strengthen" defenses.
    - **Adversaries:** Restless spirits of betrayed Rals, bone-fused wall horror, possible surviving conspirator.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Current Chapter Master (who may or may not have known), a young Gravesquire who first noticed the whispers.

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14. **The War-Heir's Escort**
    A dying lord sends his last living heir to the Chapterhouse under Ral escort, offering lands and troops in exchange. The Choir wants the heir dead; rival nobles want them "accidentally" lost; the heir themself might be tempted by the Grave Star's promises.
    - **Adversaries:** Choir assassins, mercenary ambushes, treacherous household knights.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Heir Seran or Seris (sharp but untested), Loran of the Red Cloak (bodyguard who trusts no Ral), Choir Whisperer appearing in the heir's dreams.

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15. **The Lanterns of Lowharrow**
    A coastal town strings strange lanterns along its docks, each containing a faintly glowing skull. The lights repel most undead and fog, but the skulls are Choir-made and slowly sicken the living. Ships from both loyalists and Choir ports now converge there.
    - **Adversaries:** Dockside smugglers, skull-bound wights, Choir harbor-master, opportunistic pirates.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Mayor Callen (desperate and compromised), Ina Tide-seer (old woman who reads the lantern-light like stars).

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16. **The Choir's Lost Ledger**
    A sealed ledger detailing payments to informers, bribed priests, and hidden Choir cells has gone missing from a star-temple—and rumor says a petty thief has it. If the Ral can secure it, half the region's loyalties can be exposed or reshaped.
    - **Adversaries:** Choir retrieval squad, rival Ral or Church agents, urban gangs.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Jex "Little Fingers" (thief who stole more than he meant to), Magistrate Brelda (would pay any price for those names).

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17. **The Gallows Choir**
    Bodies left to rot on a highway gallows have begun to sing at night in a thin, reedy harmony

that calls more dead from the fields. The local lord sees them as a warning against banditry and refuses to cut them down.

- **Adversaries:** Gallows Wights, scavenger crows touched by Athrakar, star-struck executioner.
- **Notable NPCs:** Lord Varro (believes fear is his only tool), Elen the Rope-Cutter (folk hero who frees the condemned by night).

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18. **The Chapterhouse Traitor's Trail**
    Evidence surfaces that someone within the Chapterhouse has been feeding information to the Choir: exact patrol routes, relic movements, even individual Companion names. The Ral is tasked to "investigate discreetly"—while still riding missions.
    - **Adversaries:** The traitor (could be knight, scribe, smith, or priest), Choir handlers, false leads.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Suspiciously helpful librarian, melancholic cook who hears everything, a Gravesquire whose notes go missing.

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19. **The Harvest of Warhorses**
    Choir agents are capturing living warhorses in bulk, driving them into old quarries. Rumor suggests they are attempting to **replicate the Grave Bond** without the Ral's ritual. If they succeed, Choir-mounted undead cavalry will change every battlefield.
    - **Adversaries:** Mounted Choir Knights, bone-fused horse abominations, beast-handlers.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Alen the Stable King (outlaw horse-thief with a code), a half-broken experimental mount that responds to the Ral's presence.

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20. **The Last Vigil of Saint Harrowfen**
    An ancient watchtower once devoted to a warrior-saint now stands half-ruined and half-occupied by Choir forces, both claiming the saint's legend. Each side insists they are the true heirs of Harrowfen's vow. The tower overlooks a pass critical to Chapterhouse supply.
    - **Adversaries:** Choir tower-garrison, star-marked "saint-guard," relic-possessed statue.
    - **Notable NPCs:** Brother Kadren (saint's last traditional guardian), Captain Lyss (Choir commander who genuinely believes Athrakar fulfilled Harrowfen's prophecy).

Part Two

Adventure Seed Adversaries

Below are entries for the **new** creatures and Choir servants used in the 20 quest seeds, expanding the Bestiary.

Grave-Star Cantor

Threat 4, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2 (robes, wards), **Wounds** 4

Attacks: Star-Hymn Pulse 65% (1d10, psychic/necrotic; may force Fear/Corruption test), Censer Strike 50% (1d8, Close)
Traits:

- Choir Liturgist (can direct undead in Near range to gain +10 on their next attack or resist Disruption)
- Ritual Focus (often anchors a local rite; disrupting or killing the Cantor can stagger a node)
- Grave Voice (when chanting uninterrupted for a full round, may tick a local **Choir Node Awakening** Clock by +2 instead of +1)

Grave-Star Cantors are the priest-singers of Athrakar, trained to turn scripture into surgery. Their voices are half prayer, half scalpel, cutting into the weave between life and death. They wear vestments lined with star-sigils and iron-thread, carrying censers that spill both incense and bone dust.

On the road, a Cantor is rarely alone—skeletal escorts and plague-bearers march in their shadow—but even stripped of followers they are dangerous. Their hymns can tighten the lungs of the living, stiffen the limbs of the dead, and pull latent corpses upright in a churchyard without a single shovel of disturbed soil.

Star-Whipped Flagellant

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 1 (leather, scarred flesh), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Barbed Lash 55% (1d6, Reach, may impose –10 to next action from pain), Frenzied Bludgeon 45% (1d6, Close)
Traits:

- Fanatical Zeal (immune to basic Fear; only severe spiritual shocks or massive casualties can shake them)
- Blood for the Star (their spilled blood on consecrated ground may tick **Sanctity Strain** or **Choir Node Awakening** Clocks)
- Mob Fervor (+10 to attack while adjacent to two or more fellow flagellants)

These are pilgrims whose despair curdled into devotion to Athrakar. They march barefoot, backs flayed raw, chanting half-remembered litanies as they whip themselves and anyone who blocks their path. The Choir finds them useful as moving screens of expendable flesh: they clog streets, soak arrows, and spread fear simply by existing.

Up close, their eyes are wild but not empty. Many were once genuine penitents of the old Church, now convinced that the only god who answered their suffering was the dead star.

Bone-Crow Murder

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1 (bone-plate), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Hooked Beak 60% (1d6, Called Shot vs eyes at Director's call), Swarm Harry (50%, imposes –10 to Awareness/Archery for one round)
Traits:

- Murder of Carrion (often appear in flocks; treat as one Threat 2 entity until broken up)
- Ash-Feathered (ignore minor smoke; gain +10 to attacks in fog or grave-mist)

- Grave-Eyes (can spot fresh corpses or shallow graves at Far range; may tick **Pursuit Closing** when tracking wounded)

Bone-crows look like ordinary carrion birds at a distance, but their feathers are streaked with ash-grey and the bones of their wings show through like knife-blades. Athrakar's light has sharpened them—beaks hook more deeply, eyes gleam with uncanny purpose.

They follow war and plague, circling Rals and Choir alike. The Choir uses them as crude scouts, teaching them to recognize Chapterhouse heraldry and the glint of plate. When they descend in numbers, they can strip a corpse to clean white bone in minutes—or blind a knight in seconds.

Bell-Wight

Threat 3, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 2 (spectral + iron-twisted), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Tolling Grasp 60% (1d10, vibrational; may inflict Disorientation), Death Chime 55% (morale attack; can cause Fear or force retreat from the belfry)
Traits:

- Bound to Belfry (cannot stray far from its bell-tower; gains +10 Defense and DR while within it)
- Resonant Curse (each combat round, Director may impose –10 on subtle actions from the oppressive ringing)
- Corpse Caller (on a full "round of tolling," may raise 1–2 nearby corpses as shamblers)

A bell-wight is what happens when a bellringer dies badly during plague or invasion and their duty is nailed to the tower harder than their body ever was. The Choir has learned to twist such haunted bells into tools: every toll spreads dread, awakens the shallow-buried, and turns villages into listening posts for Athrakar.

Seen up close, a bell-wight's form is a tangle of rope, bone, and tattered robe wound around the bell's yoke. Its fingers are worn to knotted cords of sinew, still pulling, still ringing, long after the church has lost its congregation.

Choir Auditor

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 1 (robes), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Ledger-Blade Dagger 50% (1d6), Condemnation Glare 45% (Presence contest; can impose temporary penalties or compel answers)
Traits:

- Investigator of Heresy (+10 to Insight / Deception contests, even vs shaken clergy)
- Authority of the Star (gains +10 to social pressure in lands under Choir control)
- Paper Trail (often backed by written orders; capturing their documents can expose cells or bounties)

Choir auditors are not frontline fighters, but they may be the most feared faces in loyalist towns. They travel with ledgers and writs, not lances, auditing churches, guilds, and noble houses for "contamination"—which in practice means any resistance to Athrakar.

They often arrive after strange events: bells ringing wrongly, plague carts going astray, or Rals being spotted. Their job is to decide who lives, who hangs, and who is quietly taken away to swell the Choir's experiments.

Star-Scarred Alchemical Construct

Threat 3, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 3 (alchemical plating), **Wounds** 5
Attacks: Crushing Limb 60% (1d10+2), Fume Vent 55% (1d8 in small cone; poison/soporific)
Traits:

- Alchemical Engine (unliving; immune to fear, fatigue, basic poison)
- Choir Design (often keyed to obey Cantors/Deacons; Faith/Sorcery may disrupt or seize control at Director's call)
- Unstable Mix (on Critical Wound, Director may choose an explosive or toxic death effect)

The Choir's laboratories do not only produce undead; sometimes they brew life from glass and brass. These constructs look like walking vats and jointed armor frames, etched with star-geometry. They drag plague carts, guard rite-sites, and test experimental fumes on captives.

When cracked open, their interiors smell of rusted blood, solvent, and herbs boiled past recognition. Destroying one can be as dangerous as letting it live; the pressurized mixtures inside may burst into burning fog or choking vapors.

Choir Plague-Deacon

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2 (layered robes, hidden mail), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Scalpel-Staff 60% (1d8, can cause lingering infection), Pestilent Psalm 55% (1d8 area effect; disease/Corruption)
Traits:

- Master of Plagues (can worsen existing illness Clocks, or tick **Rot/Infection** by +2)
- Field Vivisector (gains +10 to Medicine/Chirurgery for horrific "experiments")
- Corpse Logistics (may reorganize undead packs mid-fight, shifting their targets or formations)

Plague-Deacons are the Choir's battlefield surgeons and epidemiologists. Hooded and masked, they move calmly among piles of bodies, marking some for the ditch and others for "further use." They treat villages the way butchers treat herds—some to cull, some to breed, some to harvest slowly.

They rarely fight directly; instead, they stand behind a line of husks and direct disease like artillery: air, water, rats, touch. When cornered, they reveal hidden knives and psalms that invoke Athrakar's rot in a single breath.

Choir Overseer

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2 (breastplate, robes), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Commanding Strike 60% (1d8+2, polearm or sword), Barked Order 55% (Presence contest; may grant an undead ally +10 to next action or force a mortal underling to act)
Traits:

- Battlefield Coordinator (so long as the Overseer remains active, nearby Choir troops gain +10 to morale and re-roll one failed Fear test per scene)
- Ruthless Accountant (will spend lives—living or dead—without hesitation to secure objectives)
- Node Liaison (often carries keys, sigils, or codes needed to access Choir sites)

Where Cantors tend the spiritual side of Athrakar's work, Overseers handle logistics and discipline. They know how many corpses are in which pits, which barons have been bought, and how far a plague can spread before it threatens a loyalist temple.

In battle, they stand slightly behind the front line, watching with cold detachment, reallocating troops like coin. Killing them can throw a Choir operation into disarray—but they rarely enter a fight they cannot escape.

Ghoul Knight

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 3 (stolen mail/plate), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Rusted Blade 65% (1d10), Grave Bite 50% (1d8,

risk of disease/Corruption), Trample 55% (1d8, mounted)
Traits:

- Undead Cavalry (treat as mounted for charge/trample; lamed mount may cause them to fight at –10)
- Cannibal Memory (may mimic tactics or voice of dead knights, unnerving foes)
- Choir-Bound (often leashed to a local Cantor/Overseer's commands)

Ghoul Knights are what happens when the Choir drags a fallen knight from the mud and decides armor and training should not be wasted. The rider is half-rotten but still eerily graceful; the mount is a screaming shadow of its former self.

They favor shock charges and messy duels, trying to break mortal morale with the ugly parody of chivalry they represent. For a Ral, facing one can feel like looking into a cracked mirror—what you might have become if the ritual had gone just a little bit differently.

Cavalry Bone-Golem

Threat 4, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 4 (bone-plate), **Wounds** 6
Attacks: Hoof-Stampede 60% (1d10+2 area close), Lance-Ram 55% (1d12 vs single target), Bone Shard Burst 50% (1d8, Near cone)
Traits:

- Mass of Mounts (built from multiple horse and rider skeletons; counts as "Large")
- Trample Engine (on Win by 20+ Edge, may knock multiple lesser foes prone or inflict additional Wound tier bumps)
- Choir Anchor (often tied to a node or ritual; disrupting it may weaken the construct)

This abomination is a Choir answer to heavy cavalry: a single, towering construct made from dozens of dead mounts and riders, fused together with grave-iron rods and star-lit bindings. It moves with a horrible, clattering grace, hooves striking like hammers, lances protruding at random angles.

On the field, it breaks lines in a way mortals cannot—because it feels no fear, no need to regroup, no instinct for self-preservation. It simply drives forward until someone finally smashes it apart.

Drowned Star-Thrall

Threat 2, **Defense** 45%, **DR** 2 (bloated flesh), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Grasp from Below 55% (1d8, pulls target toward water), Choking Flood 50% (1d6; may impose short-term breathlessness)
Traits:

- Waterbound (lurks in wells, rivers, marshes; gains +10 Defense while submerged)
- Cold Grip (targets suffer –10 to Athletics while grappled)
- Contaminated (their touch can foul small bodies of water; may tick **Rot/Infection** or local Corruption)

These are corpses claimed by the Grave Star in rivers, wells, and flooded quarries. Their bodies never surface naturally; they simply wait, eyes open in black water, until a living soul draws near. The Choir sometimes seeds them in important crossings or village wells.

Pulling one unprepared from the water can be a shock even to a Ral: they move with the boneless smoothness of something that no longer needs to breathe, and try to share that quiet with anyone they catch.

Choir Legate

Threat 4, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 3 (ceremonial mail/plate), **Wounds** 5

Attacks: Star-Sigil Sword 65% (1d10+2), Command of Silence 55% (social/Presence attack; can freeze commoners or lesser soldiers in fear), Ritual Decree 50% (may invoke a minor rite: area –10 vs Faith, or force Corruption tests)
Traits:

- Political General (exerts authority over both clergy and soldiery; +10 to Intimidation/Persuasion in Choir lands)
- Untouchable in Court (killing a Legate has far-reaching consequences; expect Clocks to spike)
- Ceremony of Binding (can officiate star-marriages and treaties, anchoring Choir influence to noble lines)

Where Overseers handle logistics, Legates are the visible "faces" of Athrakar's will in noble courts. They arrive with banners, retinues, and carefully rehearsed piety, offering protection, grain, or undead garrisons in exchange for signatures and vows.

On the battlefield, they usually stand back—but when forced into the fray, their armor is excellent and their blades carry star-etched blessings. Some Rals liken fighting a Legate to killing a treaty made flesh.

Veiled Bridal Wraith

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 2 (incorporeal), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Embrace of Regret 60% (1d8+2, drains Will/Presence), Shriek of Broken Vows 55% (area Fear test)
Traits:

- Bound to Ceremony (tied to a marriage pact, contract, or oath; disrupting that pact may weaken or free them)
- Lure of the Aisle (can appear beautified to draw mortals closer; Disguise/Deception contests vs Awareness)
- Cold Touch of "I Do Not" (victims may suffer penalties to future social bonds and trust)

Sometimes a bride or groom forced into a star-marriage takes their own life or is sacrificed midway through the ceremony. When that happens near an active Choir rite, the resulting spirit can become a bridal wraith—a knot of terror, shame, and broken promises wearing a veil of frost.

They haunt chapels, manor halls, and roads where wedding processions once passed, striking at lovers, oath-breakers, and Choir alike. The Choir views them as both nuisance and opportunity; their presence can be turned into a note of terror in the Grave Star's hymn.

Orchard Warden

Threat 2, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 2 (leather, bark-plates), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Billhook 55% (1d8), Root Snare 50% (uses terrain; trip/entangle)
Traits:

- Bound to Grove (gains +10 Defense and Awareness within their orchard)
- Covert Cultist (appears as simple farmer at first; +10 Deception vs outsiders)
- Blood-Fed Soil (can attempt minor nature-rituals to strengthen tainted trees or calm star-touched beasts nearby)

Orchard Wardens were once just head farmers, but in lands touched by Athrakar they become something else. Charged with keeping harvests coming in the face of blight, they turn to the only patron who seems to answer: the Grave Star.

They water trees with blood, bury secrets under roots, and bargain quietly with passing Choir Deacons. To the villagers, they remain "good old Mara" or "kind Dael." To the Ral, they are a reminder of how easily necessity curdles into quiet atrocity.

Wall-Graft Abomination

Threat 4, **Defense** 50%, **DR** 4 (stone + bone), **Wounds** 6
Attacks: Mortar-Claw 60% (1d10+2), Stone Spit 50% (1d8, Near; shards and debris), Crumbling Grasp 45% (can attempt to drag a target partially into the wall, pinning them)
Traits:

- Bound to Structure (immobile or slow-moving along walls; destroying the wall section may harm or free it)
- Echo of Betrayal (often composed of traitors/knights walled up alive; may know secrets)
- Ambient Terror (its presence can impose –10 to Calm/Presence tests for the unwarned)

When bones, brick, and star-warded mortar are fused together by Choir rituals or misguided Chapterhouse "improvements," the result can be a wall-graft abomination: faces half-formed in stone, arms emerging from cracks, ribs like buttresses.

They lurk behind tapestries or in forgotten corridors, awakening only when certain words are spoken or blood touches their bricks. Fighting one is as much about controlling the battlefield as dealing damage; collapsing a hall may kill it—or bury you with it.

Gallows Wight

Threat 3, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2 (hung, stiffened flesh), **Wounds** 4
Attacks: Noose Lash 60% (1d8, Reach; may Grapple), Hanging Grip 55% (1d10 vs grappled target)
Traits:

- Bound to Gallows (gains +10 Defense and DR when fighting from its hanging place or near gallows-tree)
- Song of the Rope (their rasped "singing" can tick **Exposure** or **Fear** Clocks in nearby settlement)
- Crowd Terror (executions presided over by gallows wights inflict lingering penalties on local morale)

Left to rot on roadsides and town squares, some hanged criminals or "traitors" become anchors for Athrakar's attention. The Choir sometimes encourages this, letting bodies swing and sing rather than cutting them down.

At night, gallows wights sway and hum in thin voices, calling to the restless dead and to the darkest impulses of the living. They hate those who interfere with punishment—Ral or otherwise.

Mounted Choir Knight

Threat 3, **Defense** 60%, **DR** 3 (mail/plate), **Wounds** 4 (rider), 4 (mount)
Attacks: Star-Sigil Lance 65% (1d10+2 on charge), Sword 60% (1d8), Mount Hooves 55% (1d8)
Traits:

- Disciplined Cavalry (trained in unit charges; +10 to first attack if charging with allies)
- Star-Blessed Tack (mount gains +10 vs Fear while near Choir banners)
- Cruel Efficiency (targets fleeing, wounded, or surrendered foes at +10, reflecting doctrine)

These are Athrakar's answer to traditional knighthood: mortals or half-corrupted riders sworn to the Grave Star, mounted on disciplined but still-living horses—or early-stage undead steeds. They carry lances etched with sigils, tabards that mimic old heraldry but with star motifs.

Unlike ghoul knights, they retain clear minds and a sense of tactics. They will avoid suicidal charges unless ordered directly by a Cantor or Legate, preferring to break peasant lines and isolate key targets.

Bone-Mare

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2 (bone + scraps), **Wounds** 3
Attacks: Hoof Stomp 60% (1d8), Bite 50% (1d6)
Traits:

- Undead Mount (no fatigue, immune to mundane fear)
- Choir-Breaker's Steed (trained to attack prone or fleeing foes without prompting)
- Frayed Bond (bound crudely to Choir riders; Faith or Sorcery may sever the link, leaving the mount confused or docile)

A Bone-Mare is a crude Choir attempt to replicate the Grave Bond without the Order's ritual. They strip a warhorse down to bone and tendon, reinforce weak points with iron, and brand Athrakar's sigil into the skull.

They are fast, tireless, and utterly merciless, but lack the deep mutual awareness that true Ral war-horses share. Given time and the right rites, a Ral might even be able to reclaim or calm one, turning Choir arrogance against itself.

Skull-Lantern Wight

Threat 2, **Defense** 55%, **DR** 2 (bone + glass), **Wounds** 3 **Attacks**: Lantern Glare 60% (1d8, Near; can blind or impose –10 Awareness), Shard Burst 50% (1d6; when destroyed, may harm those adjacent)
Traits:

- Fixed Perch (usually hung along docks, walls, or streets)
- Light of the Star (their glow repels some lesser undead but attracts Choir agents)
- Silent Witness (may silently relay what it "sees" to distant Cantors/Deacons at Director's call)

These grim tools of harbor security and terror are human skulls hollowed, inscribed, and set within metal or glass housings. A faint, cold light burns within, never needing oil. They are hung as lanterns along docks, walls, and streets in towns that have bought Choir protection.

They keep away some wild undead and fog, but their gaze is not benign. Each lantern is a small eye for Athrakar, watching who comes and goes, who flees, who hides. Smashing one is a declaration of rebellion.

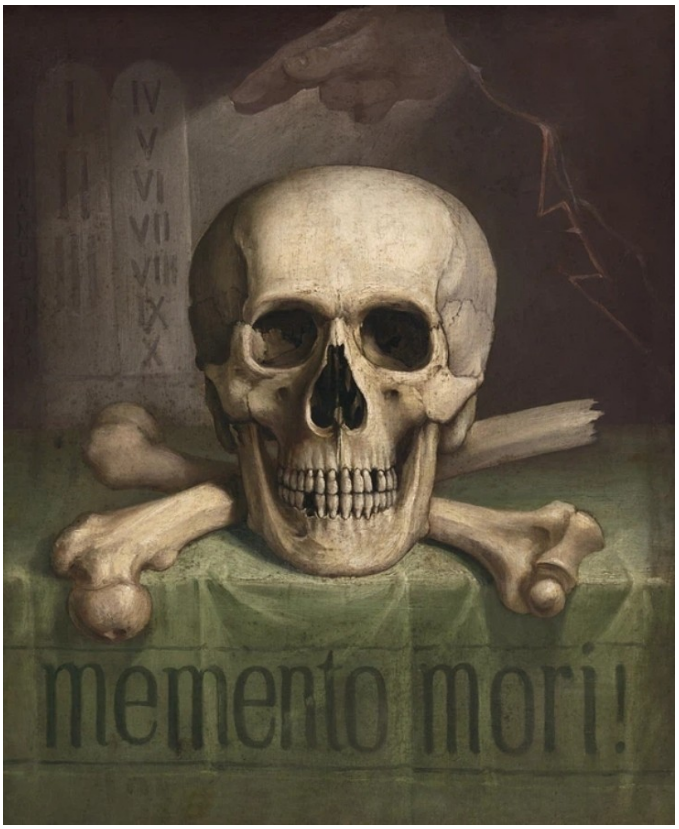
Unbound Saint

Threat 5, **Defense** 65%, **DR** 4 (holy/shattered relic), **Wounds** 7
Attacks: Radiant Smite 70% (1d12+2; may bypass armor), Judgment Wave 60% (1d10 area; Fear and potential Corruption as saint's rage lashes out), Relic Shock 55% (against undead/Choir, may force immediate retreat or Wound escalation)
Traits:

- Paradoxical Aura (both holy and star-tainted; Faith users and Sorcerers must test to safely engage)
- No Master (ignores Choir commands and most mortal pleas)
- Legacy of Miracles (its presence warps local Faith and Corruption mechanics; Director may grant boons or impose penalties based on how the Ral approaches it)

An Unbound Saint is a relic that refused to stay put. Bones once venerated in crystal cases arise, wrapped in shreds of gold cloth and incense smoke, eyes burning with a light that does not care about doctrine. In an age where both Church and Choir have betrayed their promises, the saint's wrath turns on everyone.

To the Choir, it is an error to be corrected or exploited. To the remnants of the old Church, it is a terrifying reminder that their greatest heroes may be just as broken as they are. To a Ral, it is a walking question: *what does "holy" even mean in a world nailed to a dead star?*



Part II – The Song Beneath the Well

They did not have to wait long.

The first sign was not trumpets or banners or a marching column of corpse-guard. The Choir seldom wasted such spectacle on villages like Greybarrow.

The first sign was the **well.**

Two days after the barrow-field, the water at the center of the square turned cloudy.

It was subtle at first. Tamsin noticed because she was pouring a bucket for Corren's war-horse, a habit she'd kept even after she no longer needed to.

The horse, being dead, did not drink. But she poured for it anyway, leaving the full bucket where a living mount would have used it, because the villagers watched less frightened when they saw something *normal*.

She dipped, hauled, poured – and saw, mid-arc, that the liquid was not clear. Not muddy from recent rain, not leaf-skimmed. Cloudy, with faint filaments suspended in it, like spider-silk or old ash.

She stopped, frowned, and dipped her fingers in.

The water was cold. Wrong-cold, like touching stone deep underground.

"Corren," she said.

He had been sitting on the chapel steps, helm off, cleaning his sword with slow, automatic motions, the way a man might recite an old prayer without thinking. He looked up.

"Leave it," he said at once. Dead or not, some instincts stayed sharp. "Let me see."

They peered down into the well. The rope scraped stone as the bucket swung, bumping lightly against the wall.

"Father Davorn," Corren called. "Luthen. Here."

The healer came first, his expression torn between curiosity and dread. The priest followed, out of breath, vestments hastily thrown over work clothes.

"What is it?" Davorn asked.

"Your water," Tamsin said. "Doing something it shouldn't."

Corren studied the faint drifting strands in the pulled-up bucket. They seemed to shift when he looked at them, almost aligning into patterns, then slipping away.

"Grave-filament," Luthen said, throat tight. "I've seen it once before. In a town where the Choir had dug under the wells."

Davorn paled.

"You didn't think to mention that when you were burying bells in our barrow-field?" he snapped.

"It wasn't the same," Luthen shot back. "You had restless corpses. They had... something else. A whole old necropolis under their feet."

"And now?" Corren asked quietly.

Luthen flinched. "Now I think we have *both*."

Corren straightened.

"The well is central," he said, thinking aloud. "This village drinks from it. Washes with it. Prays beside it. If the Choir wanted to mark the place – to build a pattern under the skin – this is where they'd start."

"Why not the chapel?" Davorn asked bitterly. "Surely corrupting the altar would be enough for them."

"The chapel is *yours*," Corren said. "The well is everyone's. They want to stain the common things, the ones no one thinks to fear."

He looked around the square. The villagers were watching from doorways again, conversations stilled by sense more than by sight.

"Do not drink from the well," he called, voice carrying. "Not until we say otherwise. Boil your water from the

stream. Take from barrels you already have. Do *not* touch this."

"What's wrong with it?" someone asked—a woman with a toddler on her hip, eyes shadowed by too little sleep.

"It listens," Corren said. "And I need to find out *to whom*."

They lowered Corren down on the rope.

Tamsin was the only one strong and stubborn enough to insist on holding his weight herself, though she let two of the younger villagers take spare wraps of rope for safety.

"You fall," she warned him, "and I'm not climbing down after you in full harness."

"You could," he said. "You would complain, but you could."

"Regrettably true," she muttered.

He descended, boots scraping wet stone, the air growing colder and older. The daylight from above shrank to a tight circle. The bucket brushed his shoulder as he slid past the usual waterline.

But the water was not at its usual height.

"It's lower than it should be," he called up. "Or the well is deeper."

"What do you mean?" Davorn's voice echoed down.

"I mean I have not touched water yet," Corren said. "And I've been counting bricks."

He counted nine more. Ten. Eleven. On the twelfth, his boot nudged not water but *air*.

His descent ended abruptly. The wall flared outward under his hand.

"Stop," he called. "Hold."

The rope jerked, then steadied.

"There's a gap," he said. "An opening cut under the well. Feel that cold? That's not from surface water."

Tamsin's voice drifted down, thin and anxious.

"Choir crypt?" she called. "Or something older they've borrowed?"

"Does it matter?" he replied. "Both are bad."

He let go of the rope with one hand, felt along the stone. There—a lip, worn smooth by water long ago, not by human hands. Below it, darkness with a smell that was not rot exactly, but the *memory* of rot, long settled and undisturbed.

Until now.

Corren took a breath out of habit and let go, dropping onto the unseen floor.

The impact should have jarred bone, bruised muscle. His body took it with little complaint; the rite that made him did not erase limits, but it blurred the edges.

His boots splashed into water up to his ankles. The shock of it bit, not physically, but in Essence. It felt like stepping into a very quiet room where someone is already praying to the wrong thing.

He drew his sword. Its presence in his hand was comforting in the way relics were comforting to the very pious.

"Tamsin," he called up. "Lower a lantern. And then decide if you're coming down."

She did both without comment.

The lantern swung on its line, casting pale, oil-fed light. As it descended, the space around him took shape: a low, circular chamber, wider than the well above. Brickwork merged into rough-hewn stone, then into natural rock.

And along the walls, arranged with obscene care, were skulls.

Dozens. Maybe hundreds. Placed in neat rows on narrow shelves cut into the stone, eye sockets staring inward.

"Ah," Corren said softly. "A bone house."

He had seen such ossuaries before. Some were Church-sanctioned, tidy places where old bones were stacked reverently to make room in crowded graveyards. Others – like this – had different purposes.

On the wall opposite him, a circle had been carved into the rock. The skulls nearest it bore etched sigils on their brows: small eight-pointed stars, circles, broken lines. Grave-filament drifted between them like spiders' webs that never quite settled.

As the lantern's light touched those marks, the air in the chamber vibrated faintly. The skulls' empty sockets seemed to track him.

Tamsin's boots splashed beside him a moment later.

"You shouldn't have come down," he said automatically.

"You should stop saying things you don't mean," she replied. "What in all saints' old boots is *this*?"

"A Choir listening post," Corren said. "Whoever built this bone house – centuries ago, perhaps – made a perfect gathering place. The Choir has etched their sigils into it. When Luthen buried bells in the barrow-field, he linked the restless corpses there to this place. Their hum has been feeding into this chamber, into these skulls."

Tamsin eyed the walls.

"Feeding what?" she asked.

Corren listened.

In the barrow-field, the hum had been faint, like a lullaby sung in another room. Here, it was louder. Not in his ears. In his **Essence**. Athrakar's influence thrummed in the rock, a thin, constant note.

"This is a node," he said. "A little ear of the Grave Star. They've been building a pattern under Greybarrow. Counting its dead. Learning its shape. When they hit the right number, they'll turn the pattern into a working."

"For what?" Tamsin's voice was low now, stripped of bravado.

"For a test," Corren said. "A perfect miniature. A village of dead tuned to one song. Then they'll scale it up in some city that matters more."

He moved closer to the carved circle. The sigils around it were not purely Choir work. Some were older – pre-Church grave-marks, symbols of lesser local gods. The Choir had overwritten them, but traces remained.

"That's why Athrakar's filaments are in the water," he said. "The well isn't just a drinking hole anymore. It's part of the listening structure. Every bucket poured above feeds the pattern below, and every whispered fear up there resonates down here."

"So what do we do?" Tamsin asked. "Break skulls until the song stops?"

"Eventually," Corren said. "But if we just smash, the Choir will feel the cut. They might already be on their way. We need to decide whether we're trying to hide what we've done or invite a confrontation."

"And if we do nothing?" she asked, though she knew.

"Then Greybarrow becomes a Choir experiment," he said. "They'll kill it slowly and carefully, and every death will be part of a test diagram."

Tamsin's mouth tightened.

"Right," she said. "Smashing it is."

He almost smiled.

"Not entirely," he said. "We can do better than flailing."

He hefted the lantern, holding it near the carved circle, studying the lines.

"Some of these marks," he murmured, "are still shaped for the old grave rites. There's a conduit here that

doesn't belong to Athrakar. We might be able to... re-route."

Tamsin groaned quietly.

"You're not a sorcerer," she reminded him. "You barely tolerate sorcerers."

"I am a Ral," he said. "The rite that made me sits close to this kind of structure whether I like it or not. And I carried a shard of a saint's plate through a hundred battles. If there's one thing I know, it's how to wedge myself between a corpse and the wrong song."

He unclipped the reliquary from his belt, thumb running over its cracked surface.

"This is foolish," Tamsin said.

"It is," he agreed.

"Then why am I not stopping you?" she asked.

"Because," he said, stepping closer to the circle, "if I can choke this node without alerting the whole Choir, we buy Greybarrow time. And if I can't, we may at least force the confrontation here, in a hole, where there are fewer villagers to die in the crossfire."

He pressed the reliquary shard into a shallow notch between two etched stars.

The chamber reacted like a living thing.

The hum surged, a sudden dissonant clash between Athrakar's steady cold note and whatever dim, worn echo still clung to the saint-fragment. The skulls rattled on their shelves. Hairline cracks burst across some of their surfaces, as if invisible hands clenched.

Corren gritted his teeth.

He felt the wave of Essence drain like water sluicing from a broken bucket. His inner senses — the part of him that tracked how much strength he had for Faith or Sorcery — lurched down.

"Corren!" Tamsin grabbed his arm. "Talk to me."

"Still here," he managed. "Keep hands off the circle. If this goes wrong, I'd rather it only take the part of us that's already dead."

"Comforting," she muttered.

He focused.

In the One-on-One engine, most workings were framed as Tests: you rolled, you saw how well you held, and the story answered accordingly. This was not a neat, declared spell. This was a *contest*: the Order's grave-binding against Athrakar's star-sung pull.

He'd done it before on smaller scales – graves blessed on the fly, shrines cleansed enough to house refugees for a night. He'd also failed before. There'd been more dead names on the walls because of it.

He visualized a Clock in his mind: "**Node Severed 0–100.**" Every breath, every heartbeat-that-wasn't, moved the marker. His Essence bled. He might be at half his Max, then lower. He had no certainty. Only stubbornness.

The hum shifted. Some of it began to *slip*, drawn toward the reliquary, then rerouted. The pattern etched around the circle refused to let go entirely. It grabbed, tugged.

Corren pushed back with everything he had: not by words, not by incantations, but with simple, brutal negation:

> *You cannot have this village.*
> *You cannot number these dead.*
> *You cannot turn this well into your throat.*

Somewhere in that effort, he felt Tamsin's hand tighten on his forearm. Not pulling, not prying. Just *there*. A living anchor.

The hum broke.

Not entirely. Not obliterated. But fractured.

The chamber's sound scattered into a messy chorus of small, uncoordinated whispers. The skulls stopped their almost-unison vibration and settled into lonely rattles.

Cracks raced through the carved circle. The Grave Star's filaments in the water flared bright once, then shrank, curling inward.

Corren sagged, knees hitting shallow water.

"Is it done?" Tamsin asked.

He listened.

"Yes," he said slowly. "The node is broken. Athrakar's line through this place is... knotted, at least. Any Cantor listening will hear a roar of static instead of clean hum."

"Will they notice?" she asked.

"Oh yes," he said. "They'll know Greybarrow has gone wrong. That's the part I couldn't hide."

"Then we should not be down a well when they come," Tamsin said briskly. "Up. Now."

He let her drag him back to the rope. The climb felt longer than the descent.

By the time they emerged into daylight, he was cold in a way that had nothing to do with air temperature. His Essence felt scraped raw.

The villagers gathered in the square drew back when they saw his face.

"What did you do?" Luthen asked, half accusation, half awe.

"We choked a Choir node," Tamsin said. "Your well had a bone chamber beneath it. The Choir etched skulls down there to listen to your dead. Corren broke their little listening post."

"And in doing so," Corren added, "announced that someone who understands their methods has been here."

Luthen's eyes widened.

"They'll send someone," he said. "A Cantor. Perhaps more. They don't like losing their patterns."

"Good," Corren said. "Better to fight one throat than a hundred echoes."

He looked at Father Davorn.

"Get your people inside," he said. "Bar doors. Lock shutters. Have them gather around their strongest icons. This may become loud."

"And you?" Davorn asked.

"We stand in the square," Tamsin said cheerfully grim. "Where else? If the Choir wants their village back, they can talk to their new doormen."

They did not come as an army. They came as a **procession**.

The first sound was the distant tolling of small bells. Not the dull iron of the destroyed barrow-chime; these were higher, more musical tones, overlapping in strange intervals.

The villagers huddled behind shutters and half-closed doors, eyes wide in the gaps. Tamsin could feel them watching from the corners of her vision.

Corren stood in the exact center of the square, horse at his back, Tamsin at his left shoulder. Luthen hovered a little behind, trembling but unwilling, it seemed, to hide.

"You can still go," Tamsin told him without looking around. "No one will blame you for being in the wrong place when they arrive."

"You don't know my history," Luthen said tightly. "Some of them might."

"That's not as comforting as you think it is," she replied.

They came from the road that led to the next town. At first, they looked like weary travelers: cloaks drawn close, hoods up.

Then the bells tolled again, and the cloaks shifted in a synchronized motion.

The foremost figure pulled back his hood.

His hair was tonsured in the old monastic fashion, but the shaved circle was tattooed with tiny stars instead of left bare. His robes were a grey so pale it was almost white, with a subtle pattern of darker threads that, if you stared too long, resolved into circles and bars and broken crosses.

At his belt hung a chain of small bells, each engraved with sigils. They chimed when he moved, not quite in time with his steps.

Behind him walked six figures:

- Two in similar robes, faces downcast, hands folded.
- Four armored in mismatched mail and boiled leather, armed with short spears and round shields painted with a crude pale star.

Among them, shambling but disciplined, were four corpses in chain shirts, eyes dark but alert. They moved in step, spears held upright. Their bell-strings were attached at the shoulders, so that when they marched, the entire group chimed.

"Redundant," Tamsin muttered. "Is all that noise really necessary?"

"It isn't for *us*," Corren said.

The lead man stopped at the edge of the square, taking in the bell-less well, the closed chapel, the villagers' shuttered houses, the dead rider in the center.

"Ah," he said. His voice was warm and almost amused. "The Order of Ral. I wondered which of you would answer. From the... flavor... of the interference, I thought perhaps Ral Parthanus himself. But no. You are different."

"Ral Corren," Corren said. "Former Warden of the Eastern March."

"Ah, yes." The man smiled slightly. "The one who held the line at the Three Rivers. You cost us quite a lot of quiet there. I am Precentor Ishal of the Choir of the Grave Star."

He tapped the bells at his belt.

"And you have broken my listening post."

"It needed breaking," Corren said. "You've been counting these people like stock for slaughter."

Ishal's eyes flicked to the well, then to the chapel, then to the barrow-field's direction.

"We have been *observing*," he corrected. "Triage, if you like. Assessing who might be moved gently into Athrakar's stillness, and who might need more persuasion. This village has suffered much. We offered calm. We kept their dead from tearing at them. We prevented outbreaks. What did the Order offer them?"

He gestured toward Corren's horse.

"Fear?" he asked. "The sight of iron and a war-corpse in their square?"

"We offered them the chance to stay *themselves* after they die," Tamsin snapped. "Not be turned into tuning forks for your god."

Ishal's gaze fell on her.

"A living squire," he said. "How quaint. You still inspire children to tie their lives to your walking corpses, Ral?"

"She chose," Corren said.

Ishal's smile widened.

"Of course," he said. "Everyone always 'chooses.' The desperate come to you for salvation; you give them a half-life in rust. The broken come to us for peace; we give them order. We are not so different, you and I."

"The difference," Corren said, "is where we stand when the living are in the way."

Ishal tilted his head.

"Show me," he said simply. "Show me that difference."

He lifted a hand.

The armored corpses moved in unison, spreading in a shallow arc. The living guards moved behind them, shields up, spears ready. The two robed acolytes murmured under their breath, their voices blending into a faint counter-hum with the bells.

Tamsin raised her shield, stepping half a pace forward.

"Four dead, four half-trained men, and one Precentor," she murmured. "I almost feel insulted."

"They brought enough to test," Corren said. "Not to win a war."

"Then let's be a bad test," she replied.

The first motion came from the corpses: a short, efficient spear-thrust at Corren's chest, another at Tamsin's shoulder, timed to the bell-chime.

Corren moved.

Might drove his parry aside with brutal efficiency; Grace turned his body just enough that the spear glanced off his breastplate, not digging in. His sword swept out, taking the offending corpse's spearhead clean off, then continuing to cut through wrist and throat.

The dead thing did not scream. It simply sagged, its internal animating pattern severed.

Tamsin caught her spear on her shield, twisted, slammed the shaft aside, and drove her short sword up into the corpse's armpit, where even a Choir-wrought chain shirt could not fully protect.

"Two," she said through clenched teeth.

The bells chimed again, discordant. Ishal's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Again," he murmured.

This time, the living moved first. Two guards advanced, shields overlapping, spears thrusting to drive Tamsin back and angle Corren away. The remaining corpses shifted to flank.

Corren stepped into the spearpoints rather than away, taking one on his pauldron, another grazing his side. The metal bit, but his body did not flinch the way a mortal's would; pain registered intellectually, not as a driving panic.

"Stay with me," he said to Tamsin, and cut low, a sweeping arc that drove both guards to hop back or lose feet.

The corpses lunged for the opening. Tamsin pivoted, shield slamming into one's sternum, breaking ribs with an ugly crack. She felt something shift in her own arm; bruise or sprain, it would be purple by morning. If she had a morning.

Ishal watched, bells at his waist chiming in a subtle, guiding rhythm. Each note seemed to push his troops' timing, helping them avoid the worst of Tamsin's swings, nudging their stabs closer to joints and gaps.

He was not doing full Sorcery. Not yet. This was **battle hymn** – a Choir Precentor's art, half music, half murder.

"Corren," Tamsin said. "He's calling their steps. Break *him*."

"Working on it," Corren grunted.

He feinted left at a living guard, drew the man's shield high, then whipped his blade around in a brutal, backhand cut that took the guard's knee. The man went down with a scream, dropping his spear.

The corpse behind him moved to strike at Corren's exposed flank. Before it could, Luthen – who had been hanging on the edge of the square like a man trying not to be noticed by his own past – stepped forward and flung something.

A clay vial shattered against the corpse's face. A fumes burst: acrid, eye-stinging, corrosive. Grave-moss distillate and ashflower oil; Tamsin recognized the scent.

The corpse's facial tissue began to slough away, teeth exposed in a rictus. Its eyes clouded further, then burst.

It did not stop moving entirely, but its aim went wild, spear stabbing air.

"Well," Tamsin said under her breath, "that's one way to use Choir gifts."

Ishal's head snapped toward Luthen.

"Traitor," he hissed. "We nurtured you."

"You numbered us," Luthen said hoarsely. "I was there when your 'peace' came. I know what your mercy looks like."

Ishal's expression smoothed.

"So be it," he said.

He lifted both hands.

The bells at his belt rang in a swift cascade, a scale running up, then dropping into a low, trembling chord. The air shuddered.

Corren felt Essence tugged sideways, toward the well.

"Down!" he shouted.

A ripple of force washed across the square, focused not on bodies but on *shadows*. Those cast by the corpses and the remaining living guards blackened, thickened, then rose, like figures standing up out of ink.

For a moment, there were twice as many enemies: four corpses and four wobbling, wrong negatives of them, formed of dark and cold.

"Shadow-call," Corren said between his teeth. "He's *cheating*."

"Good," Tamsin said. "We are too."

She planted her feet, raised her shield high, and bellowed.

It was not a prayer, not exactly. It was a long, wordless shout that had once probably been a Sun-Host battle hymn. Over years and battles, and more funerals than she could count, it had worn down into something rawer.

The sound cut across the bells like a blunt blade.

For a heartbeat, the shadow-things flickered. Corren charged into that flicker. His sword, being steel, should not have bitten shadow.

But he was a Ral. His sword was a Ral's blade. The rite that made him granted him a thin, stubborn presence on that edge where dead and living met. When steel struck the first shadow, the thing tore like smoke in a strong wind.

The bell-chime stuttered. Ishal's eyes widened, the first real surprise he had shown.

"The Order's rite leaves a loud stain," he murmured. "We really should have burned all of you centuries ago."

"Many have tried," Corren said.

He cut again. Each swing was slower now; Essence cost in the well-room had not left him untouched. He felt heavy, as if the air itself had thickened. But the shadow-things could not withstand direct contact with his presence. They evaporated into drifting tatters.

Tamsin engaged the remaining living guards, teeth gritted. She took a spear-graze on her thigh, answered with a shield rim to the face that broke a nose. One of the Choir acolytes tried to mutter a ward; she threw her short sword at him, hilt-first, breaking his concentration and his front teeth.

Luthen hurled two more vials – one a flash-powder that blinded a corpse long enough for Corren to remove its head, another a thick, cloying mixture that glued a living guard's sword hand to his own shield.

The square became a tangle of motion and sound: steel, bells, shouts, the wet crack of bodies failing.

In the end, there was only Ishal, standing amid fallen followers and fading shadow-tatters, bells at his waist chiming softly in an irregular pattern.

He looked around at the bodies, then back at Corren.

"You've cost us a node, a listening post, and eight souls," he said. "Do you think this matters, knight? There are hundreds of such places. Thousands."

"It matters to *this* place," Corren said. "That's what we have. One village at a time."

Ishal tilted his head.

"You are tired," he observed. "Your Essence is frayed. If I pressed you now, I might carve the Order's rite out of your bones and take it for study."

"You might," Corren agreed. His sword was still steady in his hand, but his internal sense of strength flickered like a guttering candle. "But you will not."

"And why is that?" Ishal asked gently.

"Because," Corren said, "you are listening."

He gestured, very slightly, toward the villagers' shutters.

"All these years, you have insisted that Athrakar's stillness is inevitable. That you bring mercy, not fear. If you gut a Ral in the square of a little village and hang his remains in the well, you'll win a point for your god. You'll lose something *else*."

"Which is?" Ishal asked, genuinely curious.

"The story," Corren said. "The one where you bring 'order' and we bring 'terror.' Right now, they see a Precentor who marched into their square and died with his guards. If you walk away, they'll tell the tale as warning and comfort both. If you butcher us, they'll tell *that* tale."

He took a step forward.

"And I know you care about tales," he said. "Because your rite needs belief. You don't just want bodies. You want consent."

For a moment, the two undead men – one riding the Grave Star's influence, one bound by a cracked saint's shard and an old oath – regarded each other.

Then Ishal laughed.

It was not a cackle, nor a madman's shriek. It was soft, rueful amusement.

"You are right," he said. "Infuriatingly right. Athrakar will have this world eventually. But there is no need to rush in such ugly ways."

He tapped the bells at his waist. Their chime shifted, turning inward.

"Greybarrow is no longer useful as a listening post," he said. "Its pattern is broken. Its future is noisy. I will recommend we move our attention elsewhere."

He inclined his head to Corren.

"Enjoy your reprieve, Ral Corren. You and your little church, your little squire, your little traitor healer. When the star is all that remains, I will remember this square. Perhaps I will put a stone here."

He turned, robes whispering, and walked back the way he had come.

The two surviving living guards, faces pale and eyes wide, followed. The remaining acolyte dragged the wounded with him as best he could. None of the corpses rose again.

The bells dwindled into the distance, then were gone.

The square was very quiet.

Tamsin sagged against her shield, breathing hard, then deliberately straightened when she realized half a dozen shutters were opening.

"You should sit," Luthen told her. "You've lost blood."

"You should... find us all a drink," she replied, her voice frayed. "From anywhere except the well."

Father Davorn stepped out of the chapel, tremor in his hands.

"It's over?" he asked.

“For this place, for now,” Corren said. “The Choir will not send a second precentor this month. They will write Greybarrow off as a bad experiment and find some other village with quieter dead.”

Davorn’s eyes glistened.

“And what do we do in the meantime?” he asked. “Pray louder? Fill in wells? Tear down skull houses we never knew we had?”

“You live,” Corren said simply. “You bury your dead properly. You watch for bells where they don’t belong and stars where they shouldn’t be. You remember that when someone offers calm in exchange for counting you, it’s a bad bargain.”

He sheathed his sword. The motion felt heavier than normal.

“Your well will clear in time,” he added. “The node is broken. Still, I’d draw from the stream for a while. Let the stone forget.”

Luthen shifted, looking from Corren to Davorn to the villagers now emerging from their houses, faces a mix of awe, fear, gratitude, and resentment.

“What about me?” he asked quietly. “I did wrong. I buried bells. I took their gifts. I used their rites.”

“You also helped break their corpses,” Tamsin said. “And that Precentor seemed very personally annoyed with you, which I count in your favor.”

Father Davorn studied the healer.

“You cannot stay as you are,” the priest said. “If the Choir ever sends another listening ear, it will listen for you first. But I… I would rather have a contrite sinner who knows their poisons than an empty space where a healer used to be.”

He looked at Corren.

“Does the Order claim him?” he asked. “As a prisoner, or penitent, or… whatever you make of such men.”

Corren considered Luthen.

The man had the look of someone used to watching the winds of power and tacking accordingly. Choir-medicine in his kit, guilt in his eyes, courage enough to throw vials at corpses.

“We have work for men who know Choir methods and hate themselves for it,” Corren said. “But the choice is his.”

Luthen swallowed.

“If I stay,” he said, “I risk bringing them back on my head. If I go with you, I risk being hanged in some Chapterhouse for knowing too much.”

“We don’t hang people who know too much,” Tamsin said. “We give them stacks of books and terrible tea and make them lecture apprentices until they beg for Quietus.”

Luthen’s mouth twitched, despite everything.

“Tempting,” he said.

Corren extended a hand.

“Come to the Chapterhouse,” he said. “Help us map the next bone house before it sings. It will not absolve you. Nothing does, entirely. But it will spend your guilt in a better direction than letting it rot here.”

Luthen looked around at the villagers – some glaring, some wary, some simply exhausted.

“If I stay,” he murmured, “they will always wonder whether I will go back to the Choir. If I go, they will always tell the story that a traitor healer left with the death-knight and the grave-squire.”

“Either way, you’re a story,” Tamsin said. “Pick the one you can live with.”

“Live,” he echoed, tasting the word as if it were unfamiliar.

Then he took Corren’s hand.

“Fine,” he said. “I’ll go with the corpse.”

Corren nodded once. It was more welcome than most men ever got from him.

He turned to Father Davorn.

“Take care of your well,” he said. “Your chapel. Your dead.”

Davorn bowed, more fully this time.

“And you, Ral Corren,” he said. “Take care of your... self, if you still have one.”

“I have pieces,” Corren said. “They are enough.”

They rode out of Greybarrow at dusk.

Corren in front, helm on now, a dark silhouette on a darker horse. Tamsin behind, limping slightly but refusing a cart, her pack heavier with new herbs and worse stories. Luthen perched awkwardly on a borrowed mule, his basket of vials lashed down as if it might change its mind and roll away.

At the edge of the fields, Tamsin glanced back.

Greybarrow looked much as it had three days before: crooked roofs, thin smoke, the leaning chapel, the central well. Only now, the wrong star in the sky seemed a little further away, its light slightly muffled.

“They’ll tell this tale backwards,” she said.

“How so?” Luthen asked.

“They’ll talk about the Ral first,” she said. “The dead knight who rode in and killed a Choir precentor in their square. They’ll mention the healer and the squire and the priest in passing, if at all. That’s how these stories go.”

“You sound annoyed,” Corren said.

“I am,” she replied. “We bleed too, some of us. And some of us haven’t died even once yet.”

“You will,” he said matter-of-factly. “One day.”

“Optimist,” she muttered.

He almost smiled. Almost.

“They’ll also remember this when the Choir comes whispering again,” he said. “When someone offers them calm in exchange for counting their bones. Stories are shields, Tamsin. Crooked ones, but sometimes that’s enough.”

Luthen looked up at the sky.

“You really think the Grave Star can be delayed by stories?” he asked.

“No,” Corren said. “I think Athrakar will have as many bones as it wants, in the end. But I am not in charge of the end. I am in charge of *between now and then*.”

He patted his horse’s neck. The undead mount did not react; it did not need to.

“When I took the rite,” he went on, “they told me my death would buy time. No one said for how long, or for whom. A village here, a fort there, a few years in which children grow up not hearing hums under their beds. That is what we buy.”

“And Quietus?” Luthen asked softly. “When it comes?”

“Then my name goes on a wall in the Chapterhouse,” Corren said. “Some squire reads it and remembers this village instead of some other where we arrived too late. That will have to be enough.”

They rode on.

Behind them, Greybarrow’s bell rang for the first time in weeks.

It rang clear, without hesitation, at the exact moment the sun’s last edge dropped behind the hills. It was not a perfect tone; the metal was old and the rope worn. But it swung for the right reasons.

In the high, cold sky, the Grave Star listened.

It had lost a small node, one of a thousand. A pattern disrupted, a test delayed. It did not rage. It did not sulk. It simply adjusted, its patient influence seeking other

wells, other bells, other bone houses in other forgotten places.

But somewhere, at the dim edge of that vast cold attention, the shape of a man in black armor and his quiet, stubborn sword marked itself like a scar.

Athrakar was a dead star. It understood scars.

And the Order of Ral, scattered and dwindling, understood that it was not in the business of victory.

It was in the business of bitterness and delay.

In Greybarrow, that was enough for now.

Special Chapter: Group Mode

Part One

Ever since the original One-on-One rules went out into the wild, one particular question has kept coming back to me from tables and emails alike. It usually sounds something like:

> **"We really like this engine... but can we use it with *more than one* Protagonist?"**

The core system was designed around a single lead character and their closest Companion(s), with the spotlight, Clocks, and Destiny all tuned to follow one person's choices very closely. But as people played it, many immediately saw other possibilities: two players wanting to share the same doomed road, a tight band of heroes anchored by the same fate, or a small group that liked the intimacy of One-on-One mechanics but still wanted more than one main character at the table.

After enough of those requests—and some homebrew attempts—I sat down and formalized a Group Mode that widens the frame without changing the engine underneath. The tools that follow are written with that in mind: they assume you already know how One-on-One works, and you want to keep it, but apply it to a small ensemble instead of a single Protagonist.

These procedures—shared Clocks, combined actions, and pooled resources—were first drafted in response to those original One-on-One readers asking, "What if we bring a few more blades along?" The Order of Ral uses the same Group Mode options, but you don't need to know that setting to use them. If you're coming here from the core rules and you want a way to run two or three Protagonists without bolting on a completely different system, this is the section people kept asking me to write.

What It Is

Group Mode is an optional way to run **The Order of Ral** for more than one player, where each player character is treated as a Protagonist rather than as a supporting figure. The Director still frames scenes using the same One-on-One resolution engine—d100 skill tests and contests, Advantage/Disadvantage, Destiny, and DoS/DoF when quality matters—but the spotlight, stakes, and pacing are distributed across a small band instead of a single hero-and-companion duo.

In practical terms, Group Mode changes the emphasis of play: the campaign becomes less about one singular fate-thread and more about a shared tale—a patrol of Rals and gravesquires riding the dead roads, a Chapterhouse war-band answering distress calls from failing forts, a council of death-knights navigating court politics, or a relic-seeking cadre whose loyalties are tested by Choir temptations and Quietus-haunted choices. The module remains mythic and personal, but the "I" of the story becomes "we."

Group Mode is especially strong in **The Order of Ral** because the setting itself supports ensembles: crumbling strongholds rely on many hands, long road-marches survive by discipline and morale, and borderlands and courts are ecosystems where a single voice rarely carries the day without witnesses and allies.

Optional Multi-Player Support

The following tools adapt the module cleanly to multiple Protagonists without introducing a new resolution engine. They are expressed as procedure and table practice, not as replacement mechanics.

Shared Clocks (Recommended)

When multiple Protagonists are active, tracking consequences through shared Clocks keeps tension coherent and prevents repetitive "individual failure spirals." Clocks should be visible, named in setting language, and tied to the fiction.

Common Group Mode Clocks for **The Order of Ral**:

- **Heat / Attention (0/4 or 0/6):** who is watching; city guards, Chapterhouse auditors, Choir spies, rival orders, suspicious clergy.
- **Supply (0/4):** a travel and siege clock for marches through blighted lands and periods of encirclement.
- **Morale (0/4):** garrison troops, gravesquires, frightened refugees, hired auxiliaries.
- **Pursuit (0/4):** chasing or being chased through ruined villages, forest roads, crypt tunnels, and mountain passes.
- **Debt / Obligation (0/4):** promises to nobles and bishops, Chapter edicts, blood-oaths, grave-pacts, uncollected favors.

How it plays: any failure (or partial success with consequences) can advance a Clock rather than immediately ending a scene. This preserves momentum and allows multiple characters to contribute without the Director needing to escalate to combat every time tension rises.

Combined Actions (When the Group Acts as One)

Group Mode benefits from a clear method for resolving actions where the party wants to operate as a unit—riding together through an undead-infested province, running a coordinated infiltration of a Choir cell, negotiating as a delegation before a suspicious lord, or fighting as a shielded knot on a breached wall.

There are three clean patterns; use whichever matches the scene.

1. **Lead + Support (Recommended default)**
   One Protagonist is the lead actor for the roll because the approach is singular (one plan, one decisive action). Others contribute by creating Advantage, removing Disadvantage, or mitigating consequences through their own actions and positioning in the fiction.
2. **Parallel Actions (When the band splits tasks)**
   Each Protagonist resolves their own meaningful action toward a shared objective: one distracts the gate-guards, one works the old Chapter seals on the sally-door, one watches the streets for Choir patrols. Parallel actions are excellent when you want the scene to feel like competence under pressure rather than a single roll representing the entire party.
3. **Combined Outcome (When everyone is doing the same thing)**
   Used sparingly. If everyone is rowing a barge upriver through a corrupted fog, heaving on a battering ram, or digging survivors out of a collapsed chapel, the Director can treat it as a single crisis with multiple contributors. The key is to keep it readable and avoid turning it into "everyone rolls until someone succeeds."

What to Verify Before You Run Group Mode

This section exists to keep Group Mode faithful to the One-on-One engine and to avoid accidental drift into a different system.

Combined Action Mechanics

Verify the following in your One-on-One core text and apply it consistently:

- **Assist rules:** what is the standard bonus and when is it allowed?
- **Multiple helpers:** whether assistance stacks, and if so, how (or whether the Director should cap it).
- **Contests:** whether assistance changes only one side's effective skill, and whether hindering a foe works the same way.
- **Destiny in group play:** whether Destiny is strictly personal to each Protagonist or whether a table variant exists for shared Destiny.

The goal is to preserve clean outcomes: avoid situations where four characters "pile on" and erase risk purely through stacking.

Lead/Support Procedure

Confirm whether the core rules provide any formal language for "lead/support." If not, treat it as a Director-facing method of framing, not a mechanical construct:

- One player is designated as the lead because their approach is the actual attempt.
- Others act to create Advantage, remove Disadvantage, or prevent a consequence.
- The Director ensures that non-leads still have meaningful rolls by framing parallel tasks.

Pooled Resources

If the table wants a group resource pool (coin, favors, Chapterhouse stores), confirm:

- How you want to represent it (a small track, a Clock, or simple narrative inventory).
- Whether spending it creates consequences or obligations (recommended, in this setting).

Keep it lean. The module benefits from scarcity pressure, but it does not benefit from accounting.

Changes to Companion Handling in Group Mode

If every player character is a Protagonist, companions should not inflate the cast until the table becomes unmanageable.

In Group Mode, Companions work best as one of the following:

1. **Shared Companion**
   A single companion (such as Helvar the Relic-Smith or Sister Maera the Confessor) belongs to the party rather than a specific Protagonist. The Director uses them to create openings, move Clocks, and express setting tone.
2. **One Companion per Protagonist (Soft Limit)**
   If the group is very small (two Protagonists), each having a companion can work. Above that, it typically becomes too many moving pieces.
3. **Companions as Assets, not Characters**
   Gravesquires, garrison troops, laborers, and guides can be treated as assets that grant situational Advantage or mitigate a consequence, without requiring full companion sheets.

What to verify: whether the core rules' Companion actions (Assist/Screen/Anchor) assume a single companion or allow multiple, and whether any caps or pacing guidelines are stated. In Group Mode, the clean practice is to keep companion impact meaningful but not dominant.

Special Chapter: Group Mode

Part Two

Shared Spotlight (Group Mode Procedure)

In one-on-one play, the spotlight is naturally concentrated: a single Protagonist carries the camera, and every scene is framed to test that hero's will, competence, and Destiny. In Group Mode, the danger is the opposite. The tale can sprawl; the loudest voice can begin to steer; the party can become a committee where no one is truly tested, or a parade where only one Protagonist gets meaning.

Shared Spotlight is the module's answer to that drift. It is not a new resolution engine. It is a **scene-and-pressure procedure** that keeps the One-on-One feel—decisive tests, clean consequences, vivid DoS/DoF outcomes—while ensuring each Protagonist receives *earned hero moments* across the same story arc.

Use Shared Spotlight when you want the campaign to feel like an ensemble of legends: a caravan's sworn band, a ship's crew that survives by unity, or a courtly circle that wins by layered craft rather than a single silver tongue.

The Core Idea

Every episode has a **Scene Holder** (the Protagonist "in focus"), but every scene also has **Hooks for the Others**—clear ways for non-holders to matter without stealing the camera. Shared Spotlight formalizes that balance:

- **One Protagonist makes the decisive attempt** (the lead test or contest).
- **Other Protagonists earn impact** by setting up Advantage, removing Disadvantage, containing consequences, or creating new options that change what success or failure means.

The Director's job is to frame scenes so the "lead" is obvious, while the *supporting actions remain meaningful*—not ornamental.

Shared Spotlight Mechanics

Spotlight Order and Beats

At the start of each session (or each major episode, if the session is long), establish a simple **Spotlight Order**: a clockwise seat order, an agreed list, or a card draw. This order is the *promise* that every Protagonist will hold the scene at least once before the story moves into its climax.

A **Beat** is one meaningful scene: it carries risk, it can change the situation, and it ends with a concrete outcome (a gain, a loss, a complication, a Clock tick, a revealed truth, a door opened).

Rule of Thumb: In a typical session, aim for **one Beat per Protagonist**, then a final shared Beat (the "group crest") where the band acts together under pressure.

Scene Holder: What It Means

When a Protagonist holds the scene, it means:

- The **primary question** of the scene belongs to them ("Can I talk the gatekeeper into granting sanctuary?" "Can I cross the singing dunes before the mirage eats the trail?").
- The **decisive roll** is theirs, when a roll is needed.
- The **cost of failure** lands primarily on them (wounds, exposure, debt, disgrace, separation), even if consequences splash outward.

This preserves the One-on-One texture: a hero steps forward, risks something real, and the world answers.

Supporting Protagonists: Three Ways to Matter

When you are not the Scene Holder, you still act. Shared Spotlight gives three clean roles for non-holders. Choose one per Beat (or rotate if the scene is large).

A) Setup (Earn Advantage / Remove Disadvantage)

You take an action that meaningfully improves the Scene Holder's position.

Examples in *Sands*:

- You slip into the crowd to identify who is watching the negotiation.
- You produce the correct gift to prevent insult.
- You quietly translate a phrase before it becomes a social wound.
- You climb to a roofline to spot the guards' shift change.

Mechanical Impact: If the setup is credible, it grants **Advantage** to the Scene Holder's decisive roll (typically +10; more if the fiction genuinely warrants it). If the scene began under Disadvantage, a strong setup may **reduce or cancel** that Disadvantage instead.

Setup rolls are only called for if the setup itself is risky or contested. If it is simply competent preparation, it stands without dice.

B) Contain (Reduce Consequences / Hold the Line)

You act to prevent failure from becoming a collapse.

Examples:

- You keep a witness calm so the scene doesn't turn into a riot.
- You distract the eunuch informant long enough for the deal to be sealed.
- You treat the bleeding wound while the negotiation continues.
- You physically block a corridor so reinforcements arrive late.

Mechanical Impact: On a failure by the Scene Holder, containment can:

- convert a harsh consequence into a lesser one,
- prevent an additional Clock tick,
- allow the party to withdraw without being broken,
- or preserve a key asset (papers, gear, a hostage, a vehicle).

Containment is especially valuable because it keeps the tale moving. It turns "we failed and the campaign stalls" into "we failed, but we escape with scars—and the story becomes sharper."

C) Pivot (Create a New Option)

You do not improve the current attempt; you open a different door.

Examples:

- You notice a second path through the market—one that avoids the guards but enters a rival's territory.
- You recognize the relic's maker's mark and recall a forbidden buyer.
- You pick up a whispered name that shifts who holds leverage.
- You catch the scent of incense associated with a known cult.

Mechanical Impact: Pivot actions do not add numerical bonuses by default. Their value is **structural**: they create new choices and force the Director to reframe stakes. A pivot can also justify ending a Beat early and moving to the next with the situation transformed.

Spotlight Tokens (Optional, Recommended)

If the table wants an explicit fairness tool, use **Spotlight Tokens**.

Each Protagonist begins a session with **1 Spotlight Token**.

- When you take a meaningful supporting role (Setup, Contain, or Pivot) that changes the scene, you may spend your token to claim one of the following:
    - **Make it Count:** Your contribution grants a clear, explicit Advantage (+10) or cancels an equivalent Disadvantage, if it was not already granted by the fiction.
    - **Hold the Cost:** If the Scene Holder fails, you absorb one defined consequence instead (you take the Heat, you take the injury risk, you take the obligation, you become the one recognized).
    - **Cutaway Reveal:** You may add a small but consequential truth the camera "discovers" in the moment (a hidden door, a familiar insignia, a whispered taboo). This must be plausible and must not nullify the Director's established facts.

Spotlight Tokens refresh at the start of the next session (or after a major arc crest, if your sessions are long).

Design Intent: Tokens do not replace Destiny. Destiny remains personal, story-forward leverage on a decisive roll. Spotlight Tokens are *ensemble fairness*: they ensure contributions are seen and paid off.

Shared Spotlight and Destiny

In Group Mode, Destiny can create an uneven rhythm if one Protagonist spends aggressively and others hoard—or if only one character keeps being forced into the decisive roll. Shared Spotlight corrects the second problem by rotating Scene Holders. For the first, the Director frames Destiny usage openly:

- When a Scene Holder spends Destiny to swing a pivotal moment, it is a **hero beat**—a legend being written.
- When a supporting Protagonist spends their Spotlight Token to contain or pivot, it is a **crew beat**—the band refusing to break.

A group that uses both tools will feel like the tales that inspired this module: a shining protagonist moment, followed by the quiet competence of allies who keep the story from ending early.

Running Shared Spotlight in Play

Director Guidance: The Scene Question

Before each Beat, the Director states (briefly) the scene's question and assigns the Scene Holder by Spotlight Order.

Examples:

- "Can Ramlah get the caravan through the storm without losing the water-skins?"
- "Can the Courtier secure sanctuary without binding the band to a patron?"
- "Can the Corsair keep morale from breaking when the sea turns wrong?"

This makes the lead clear and prevents the scene from being "everyone talks until something happens."

Director Guidance: The Two Hooks Rule

When framing any Beat, provide **two hooks** for non-holders—two clear ways others can matter.

Examples:

- "The negotiation is public (Setup hook: read the crowd / identify watchers). The gate captain is proud (Contain hook: prevent insult / stabilize tensions)."
- "The dunes are singing (Setup hook: chart a path / interpret signs). The storm is fast (Contain hook: secure loads / treat exhaustion)."

Hooks are not mandates. They are invitations to contribution that remains coherent.

Example Beat: Bazaar Bargain Under Watch

Scene Holder: Bazaar Trickster
Scene Question: "Can the Trickster purchase the map without alerting the guild enforcers who already suspect counterfeit coin?"

- **Setup (Scholar):** The Story-Scribe quietly identifies the merchant's true patron mark and signals the correct honorific. The Director grants Advantage (+10) to the Trickster's Persuasion/Influence approach.
- **Contain (Guard):** The Caravan Guard positions near the exit and subtly blocks an enforcer's line of sight, preventing a second Clock tick if the roll goes poorly.
- **Pivot (Falconer):** The Beast-Caller notices a courier hawk bearing a palace tag. That tag is a door to a different buyer—dangerous, but real.

The Trickster rolls the decisive test. Success means the map is acquired cleanly. Failure means the map is still acquired, but the enforcers now have certainty—Heat advances, and the next Beat begins with pressure rather than rest.

The result is a Group Mode scene that still feels like One-on-One: one hero risks the roll, but the band shapes what the roll means.

Summary: Shared Spotlight in One Paragraph

Shared Spotlight is a Group Mode procedure that rotates decisive scenes between Protagonists while preserving the One-on-One engine. Each Beat has a Scene Holder who makes the decisive attempt, and other Protagonists contribute through Setup (earn Advantage), Contain (reduce consequences), or Pivot (create new options). Optional Spotlight Tokens provide explicit fairness without replacing Destiny: Destiny remains the hero's fate-lever, while Spotlight Tokens ensure the ensemble's contributions matter in concrete, mechanical ways.

Growth Points and Shared Spotlight (Group Mode)

Shared Spotlight works best when the reward economy reinforces what it is trying to accomplish: fair camera time, meaningful risk, and consequences that matter. In Group Mode, keep your campaign's advancement pace stable by awarding **the same total session GP you would award in one-on-one**, then distribute it according to Spotlight Beats. This prevents "more players = faster leveling," while still ensuring the Protagonist who carried the decisive moment earns clear credit. Spotlight doesn't exist to hand out points for being present; it exists to make **who acted, who enabled, and who paid the cost** legible—so rewards follow the fiction cleanly.

Step 1 — Set the Session GP Total (unchanged).
Determine the session's GP award exactly as you normally do. Treat that number as the only GP available for the session.

Step 2 — Identify "Meaningful Beats."
A Beat counts for GP distribution only if it contained at least one of the following:

- a roll with declared stakes (Test or Contest),

- a real consequence (Clock tick, wound, debt/obligation, exposure, loss), or
- an irreversible choice that reshaped options or changed the direction of play.

If the Beat was only table chatter, color, or travel narration with no risk, it does not generate Spotlight credit.

Step 3 — Allocate GP by Spotlight Roles.
For each Meaningful Beat, assign shares from your session GP pool until it is spent. Use these shares as a fast method:

- **Primary Share (2 GP):** The Beat's **Scene Holder** when the Beat carried real stakes.
- **Secondary Share (1 GP):** A **supporting Protagonist** whose action clearly changed what success/failure meant (created Advantage, removed Disadvantage, prevented or reduced a consequence, opened a new viable option the group used).
- **Cost Share (1 GP):** The Protagonist who **took the consequence** when that consequence materially shaped what happened next (wound tier penalties, Heat, Debt, lost gear, separation, social stain, etc.).

Step 4 — Hard Limits for Clean Play.

- **Do not exceed the session GP total.** When the pool is gone, awards stop.
- **Secondary is earned, not automatic.** If support did not change outcomes, it is color, not credit.
- **Optional simplicity rule:** Only **one Secondary Share** may be awarded per Beat (choose the most impactful support).

Result: Scene Holders grow for carrying decisive moments; supporters grow for enabling success; and the character who paid the cost is not mechanically erased for doing so. Advancement stays consistent across campaign size, and Spotlight remains a pacing tool—not a point farm.

Example Allocation (3 Protagonists, 6 GP Total)

The Director would normally award **6 GP** for the session, so the Group Mode pool is **6 GP**.

Beat 1 — Rooftop pursuit through Qamar (Meaningful: chase contest, Heat Clock ticks).

- Scene Holder: Protagonist A → **Primary Share (2 GP)**
- Protagonist B creates a shortcut that removes Disadvantage and prevents a Clock tick → **Secondary (1 GP)**
  Pool spent: 3/6

Beat 2 — Bargain at Saqif where the deal succeeds "yes, but" (Meaningful: social test, Debt Clock added).

- Scene Holder: Protagonist B → **Primary Share (2 GP)**
- Protagonist C takes the consequence by accepting the Debt in their name; the obligation shapes next episode → **Cost (1 GP)**
  Pool spent: 6/6 (stop)

End State:

- A earned 2 GP (carried the chase).
- B earned 3 GP (carried the bargain; enabled the chase).
- C earned 1 GP (paid the cost that drives future play).

No GP inflation occurred, but Spotlight fairness is reinforced: each Protagonist received advancement credit tied to what they actually did and what they endured.

You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day

cannot unveil the mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death,

open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

- Kahlil Gibran